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ENTERED AT THE POST OFFICE AT NEW YORK, N. Y., AT SECOND CLASS MAIL RATES.

Vol. XXXIII.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y., November 17, 1886.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

No. 421



OR, The Queen of Bowie Notch.

A Romance of Man, Woman and
Mystery in Frisco and the
Gold Camps.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "FLASH DAN," "DENVER DUKE,"
"COOL CONRAD," "DESPERATE DOZEN,"
"KEEN KENNARD," "MAJOR BLIS-
TER," "CAPTAIN COLDGRIP,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE SHADOWER'S VISITOR.

A SUMMER day of rare beauty was soon to give place to night, when a man entered the office of one of the best known hotels of San Francisco and approached the desk with an anxious air.

He was a well-built person of fifty, or thereabouts, with a tinge of gray in his hair and heavy mustache, wore good clothes, apparently new, and had a quick, nervous step.

FOR SEVERAL SECONDS THE QUEEN OF BOWIE NOTCH LOOKED IN ASTONISHMENT
AT THE MAN WHOSE COOLNESS HAD ALMOST DRIVEN HER MAD.

"Excuse me, sir," he said to the clerk, who was busy at the ledger a few feet away, "but can you tell me whether this person is in or not?"

As the stranger spoke, he extended a card, on which was printed the following:

"FREDERICK FERGUS,

"Room 98, Occidental,

"San Francisco.

"FATHER FERRET."

The clerk looked from the card into the face of the man across the counter.

"Are you the person he expects?" he asked.

"I suppose I am."

"Then Mr. Fergus is in. Do you know the way to 98?"

"I do."

The clerk went back to his accounts, and the man turned away with a satisfied smile.

"If I don't know the way up, by Jove! I will find it!" he exclaimed. "If there's a place in Frisco I can't find, I'd like to hear of it."

With the assistance of the elevator the man found his way to the third floor, and an opportune bell-boy directed him to Room 98.

In another moment he was at the door; then he rapped lightly, while his eyes glowed with a good deal of eagerness.

A quick footstep came across the room inside, and when the door was opened, the visitor found himself standing before a remarkable-looking man.

"Walk in!" spoke the man who held the door open. "I did not look for you this evening, but no matter; walk in, sir."

While this invitation was being spoken, the speaker seemed to be looking into the very mind of the man on the threshold.

"I came up to see you," the caller answered, "and so I'll accept your invitation," and in he went.

There were two chairs at one of the windows of the room that looked out upon the street, and the visitor was asked to accept one while the room's occupant took the other.

It has been remarked that the man called Frederick Fergus was a remarkable-looking person, and so he was.

Past sixty, if his age was to be judged by the the color of his abundant hair, he was still as well preserved as a careful man of forty.

He was deficient in stature, scarcely an inch above five feet, but his frame was physical perfection. His eyes were small, deeply set and dark blue, and his clean-cut face was sallow in color and beardless.

Attired in plain clothes which had not that newness that distinguished those worn by his visitor, Father Ferret looked like a person who took things easily, and with whom the world was at peace.

He did not seem to watch his caller closely after he had become seated, but, for all this, the blue eyes were at work.

"You are Father Ferret, the gold-mine detective, I believe?" began the caller.

"I am some times called that."

"I am Major Montooth, late of the army."

"Which army?"

It was shortly after the war, and Father Ferret's question was perfectly natural.

Montooth laughed.

"The Confederate army," he answered. "I was in California before the war, and I've only come back to my own."

"That's natural."

"You have said you were not looking for me," continued the ex-Confederate. "I know this to be true. I am probably the last man you were looking for."

"Probably, major."

"I have not visited you as Major Montooth, of the Lost Cause, but as—" the man paused and leaned slightly toward the detective whom he eyed closely—"but as Captain Bluff, who, a few years ago, was not unknown in some portions of California."

Father Ferret did not start, and the blue eyes got no new gleam, although the announcement was given the benefit of an impressive tone.

"You want to see me, eh?" he asked dryly.

"Indeed I do, and on important business. We are safe here, are we not?"

The detective nodded, and Captain Bluff, or Major Montooth, drew his chair closer and went on:

"In the first place, I want to know if you are unemployed at this particular time?"

"I have a good deal of time on my hands."

"And can serve me?"

"Perhaps—shall I say, major?"

"For form's sake, yes. Let me be Major Montooth, for the present. Captain Bluff was killed at Ball's Bluff—don't you see, ha, ha!—shot in the most approved style by a Federal sharpshooter. Now, Father Ferret, I come down to business."

"Before I went to the war I had two things that were very dear to me—a daughter and a piece of paper not much larger than your hand. I lost them both."

The speaker paused as if to note whether the mention of his losses had produced any effect on the detective, but Father Ferret's face was calmness itself.

"My daughter Sybil is my first wife's child. The woman is still living, but the trail of the girl seems completely lost. I got my wife in Vera Cruz on a short acquaintance, and got rid of her when Sybil was little more than a babe. She never liked the child, and always hated me. There was too much Spanish blood in her veins to suit your humble servant."

"Well, I tried to raise Sybil myself. My second wife was a Los Angeles woman by whom, confound it! I got terribly taken in again. You will see, Father Ferret, that my matrimonial ventures have not been brilliant successes. The war came on the year after I put my head into the second nuptial noose. I wanted a change, for the Los Angeles Hebe was making it uncomfortably warm for Captain Bluff. I went South, and turned up in Texas in Confederate gray."

"I took my daughter with me and left her at Galveston in charge of a friend. A month later that friend got the war fever and sent Sybil back to my wife; then volunteered. In the third year of the war Sybil disappeared from home, and my second wife killed herself in this city. I heard of the tragedy in the field, got a furlough and came here in disguise. I heard a good many things about my wife, but I let them go in my hunt for my child. I guess I've ransacked this part of the continent pretty thoroughly since," and the ex-Confederate smiled. "I want to find the girl, for I can make her the richest woman between the oceans! It's no dream, Father Ferret. I've lost my precious bit of paper, but I have found the trail it led to, and I don't need it now. The paper turned up missing about the time my first wife dissolved the partnership existing between us. I don't think she took it, for she did not know I had it in my possession. It went away, anyway, and it didn't walk, either."

"Stolen?"

"Stolen!" echoed Captain Bluff. "I have reason to believe that it was stolen by a certain person who isn't many miles from here at this moment—a person whom I propose to kill on sight!"

The words spoken between set teeth gave a new flash to the speaker's eyes.

"Now, sir, as a matter of course I want your services, Father Ferret."

"You want to find Sybil?"

"That is it, exactly! Don't I want to make her the money queen of this continent? Don't I want to make that Mexican Hecate of mine grate her teeth over my work?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Father Ferret, his eyes lighting up for the first time, "then you know where she is."

"Don't I!" cried Captain Bluff. "Don't I know that this woman whom I threw off is now the Queen of Bowie Notch, a gold 'city' in the nugget range? Don't I know that she has collected about her the most desperate set of men that ever were subdued by a pair of black eyes? Queen of Bowie Notch! Do you know where it is, Father Ferret?"

Captain Bluff thought the old detective shook his head when in truth it did not move.

"I'll show you by the map," he went on drawing from an inner pocket a map of California which he opened on his lap and ran his bronzed finger over it.

"It is here—here, deep in the upper gold range!" he exclaimed. "This spot is Bowie Notch where Queen Ninez, as she calls herself, runs her ranch. I haven't seen her since I came back from the war. I saw so much of her before that I don't want anything to do with her. Let her reign where she is. But the girl—Sybil—is the person I want. You understand, sir?"

"It is very plain," responded the detective, quietly.

"I am rich enough to pay you any fee you name," Captain Bluff went on. "Money is nothing to me. The war impoverished me, but my immortal 'find'—there's where I struck it! When can you begin?"

A singular smile just perceptible appeared at the corners of Father Ferret's mouth.

"You take it for granted that I am your man?"

"Great Caesar! ain't you?" cried Captain Bluff.

"Have I said so?"

"No, but—Jupiter! I must have you! I knew you were in the city by finding your card on the street."

"On the street?" asked the gold-camp spotter starting slightly.

"On the street! Here it is," and the ex-soldier produced the card which Father Ferret took and eyed sharply. "Do you know who lost it?"

The old detective shook his head, and the child-hunter was shrewd enough to see that the card with his own name on it was a puzzle to him.

"But for the lucky find I would not be here," Captain Bluff resumed. "I almost jumped out of my boots when I saw I had you so near. I've heard of Father Ferret before. I know a good deal about you—enough to believe that you can find Sybil, and that you are a match for all my enemies, though I don't intend that you shall fight the battle alone. You will serve me, won't you?"

"Come here at eight o'clock. It is seven now."

"You will decide then?" asked the Confederate.

"I will be here."

"I won't listen to a refusal!" declared Captain Bluff as he left the chair. "If you like excitement, and they say you do, you'll find all you want on this hunt after Sybil Stacey. It won't be a dry trail by any means, Father Ferret. If you want one—five—ten thousand in advance, say the word!"

"At eight o'clock," was the reply.

Captain Bluff gave the detective a deep look, and turned away.

"I'll be here at eight and I want 'yes' when I come. Remember that!" he sent back over his shoulder from the door, and the next moment Father Ferret was alone again.

He stood at the window and listened to his visitor's retreating footsteps in the hall. A smile was on his face.

"He wasn't the man I was looking for, but, Jupiter Pluvius! what luck!" he exclaimed, as his deep-set eyes seemed to twinkle. "Now, if Jordan will come, I will surprise him."

Father Ferret turned toward the open window and glanced across the street.

On the opposite side he distinctly noted a man whom he seemed to recognize, for, all at once, the person made a gesture with his hand and began to cross the street.

Three minutes later a tall and handsome young man walked into the detective's room.

"I see you've had a caller," he said to Father Ferret. "I did not like to intrude while he was here."

"Yes, I had a caller. Who do you think he was, Jordan?"

"I have no idea."

"He called himself Sybil's father!"

The young man recoiled with an exclamation of surprise.

"That man?" he cried. "That person the noted Claude Stacey?"

"So he says."

"Then I'll keep him in sight. Heavens! we must not lose that man."

"We will not!" assured Father Ferret coolly. "He may be a liar, but I know his worth."

CHAPTER II.

THE BARGAIN CLOSED.

At eight o'clock, punctual to the very minute, Claude Stacey, or Captain Bluff as he called himself, walked into the room occupied by Father Ferret, the detective.

"You see I am on time," smiled the Californian.

"That is good."

The visitor did not take a chair, but came straight toward the spotter and halted before him.

"You know why I am here," he went on. "It is eight o'clock—the time you set yourself. Can I count on you? That is what I want to know."

"I am to find Sibyl, eh?" asked Father Ferret.

"My missing Sybil!" exclaimed Stacey. "That is exactly what you are to do."

"When found, what?"

"I am to receive her of course."

"You?"

Father Ferret gave the man a close, scrutinizing look as he spoke.

"Why not?" cried Stacey. "Ain't I the girl's father? Who has a better right to her than I?"

The old detective made no reply, but quietly drew a well-worn memorandum-book from his pocket and consulted it.

"What the devil is he doing now?" muttered the Californian. "I have heard that this old fellow is peculiar, and now I know it."

Suddenly the detective looked up, and the eyes of the two men met.

"Sybil disappeared on the twenty-third of May," remarked Father Ferret coolly.

Claude Stacey started.

"Yes," he answered, "on the twenty-third."

"At night."

"At night!"

"Are you certain of the date? I may be mistaken."

The eyes of the old detective were fastened on the man before him.

"I don't know where you get the date," said Stacey, "but you have it correct. Sybil disappeared rather mysteriously, but with no suspicions of foul play at the time. I was absent in the army, then, you know. But you haven't given me your decision. Are you going to take the trail?"

"I am!"

Father Ferret spoke in a voice that brought Stacey toward him with a spring and a light cry.

"Thank Heaven, I will soon see my own!" he exclaimed. "Do you want any instructions?"

"None."

Captain Bluff drew off and looked at this strange man. There was something about the California detective that attracted him, something cool and daring enough to command admiration everywhere.

The two men were each other's opposites in

physical make-up—Claude Stacey tall and powerfully built, and Father Ferret short, not very stout, but wiry and quick.

The detective suddenly shut his note-book up and put it back into his pocket. Then he walked to the open window and threw a quick glance across the street.

"The money consideration is next to be settled," spoke Stacey. "How much do you want at the beginning of the chase?"

Father Ferret turned quickly upon him.

"Money?" he smiled showing his teeth. "What do I want with money?"

"But you must have something to begin on."

"Not a dollar!"

"By Jupiter! this man is a mystery!" murmured Stacey.

"Well, if you won't take anything now you will charge your expenses up to me—"

"Maybe there will be no charges of the kind," interrupted Father Ferret with a wave of the hand. "Let the money question be considered settled. I want to ask about one thing."

"Go ahead."

"This first wife of yours, captain, this Mexican from Vera Cruz? Did you leave her?"

"Zounds! no! she left me!" laughed Stacey. "Our parting wasn't the mildest one you can imagine. See here!"

The speaker threw one hand up to his neck and pulled his collar down as he leaned toward the detective.

"She gave me this just before she said adieu," he went on displaying a scar about an inch long. "She did her best to reach the jugular, but my luck frustrated the game. She left me, Father Ferret—left me for dead, ha, ha! If you run across the tigress in her jungle you don't want to give her a chance with her dagger."

Father Ferret did not appear to notice the advice.

"I am certain she knows nothing about Sybil. I've satisfied myself on that point," Stacey went on. "She is content to reign Queen of Bowie Notch, but if she knew that I had come back from the war, why, by Jove! she might desert her realm long enough to finish the bungled work of years ago. When do you begin the hunt for me?"

"For you?—to-night!"

"That delights me! And you want no money now?"

"No."

Father Ferret spoke in tones which told that he considered the interview and the bargain at an end.

"Good-by," said Stacey holding out his hand.

The eyes of the detective seemed to snap as he took it, and the next moment the men stood apart, Stacey with his face turned toward the door.

Father Ferret wheeled toward the window as Stacey left the room, and made a singular gesture with his hand.

There was a reply from a young man who stood near the opposite curb, and when Captain Bluff emerged from the hotel a pair of clear black eyes were upon him!

"I see that it is a big game and a deep one," laughed Father Ferret to himself. "For once in my life luck has beaten acumen, and I shall take up the new cue she has given me. I believe this will be my last trail. I'm getting old and I want something big to wind up on. I have found it, and between Jordan and I something startling will happen. Jordan is playing shadow now, and I will get ready to penetrate the jungle of the tigress. So I am to look out for her claws, am I? By Joshua! I'm never so happy as when I have something of this kind to watch. Father Ferret is himself again! Now, let everything go!"

Meanwhile, Claude Stacey was hurrying rapidly down the street with a face that proclaimed his appreciation of the interview with the Gold-Camp Detective.

He had no thoughts that he was being watched by the young man who had replied to Father Ferret's signal thrown from the window, and feeling entirely secure, he did not look behind him.

As Major Montooth, he was tolerably well-known in San Francisco. His circle of acquaintances was not large, nor did it contain any who knew Claude Stacey or "Captain Bluff" before the war.

As he was masquerading as Major Montooth, he did not court the discovery of his identity, and it might have been for a reason of this kind that he avoided Claude Stacey's friends.

The war had changed his personal appearance. Camp and battle-field had given him the mask which he wore so well, and he had learned with much delight that Claude Stacey was believed to have fallen at Ball's Bluff.

As he kept down the street, with Father Ferret's young friend Jordan at his heels, the captain, as he may be called, thought only of success as shown by his glittering eyes.

"I will impart my triumph to my only pard, Falcon," he suddenly decided. "I know just what he will say, but no difference; I don't yield an inch. Where we have failed that trail-dog will succeed. He leaves Frisco to-night and I have but to await his report. It is a deep game, sure enough, but the stake is worth playing for."

I think I played a cool hand before Father Ferret, sharp as he is. He intimated that he has heard of Captain Bluff and his Mexican tormentor. No doubt of it. Now this same person has given him a new trail. We will see very soon what he will make out of it."

All at once Claude Stacey stopped in front of a large hotel and stood face to face with a man, at sight of whom he seemed to recoil.

The person who thus affected him was almost his own height; he had dark eyes and intensely black hair, so black and coarse that it might have been dyed.

The two men came face to face under a lamp, and they seemed to see each other at the same moment.

It was a strange meeting.

Claude Stacey attempted to pass on.

"Not now, old fellow," he cried, between his teeth. "Some other time, and very soon, I'll show you a hand that never fails."

The next second he was almost touching the man he wished to avoid, and he was entertaining hopes of passing him when a hand fell upon his arm.

The touch seemed to thrill the captain.

"I want a moment with you," spoke the strange man in an undertone.

"With me? Ain't you mistaken in the man?" "No, sir. You are called Major Montooth, I believe."

"I am."

"Then I want to see you and no one else. Where can we go?"

It was evident that Claude Stacey was trying to control himself.

This man, whoever he was, was not the person he wanted to encounter at that time.

"Well, then, I'll show you where we can talk," he replied. "We'll go to the Eldorado."

Side by side the two men passed down the street another half square, and Stacey turned suddenly into a drinking house quite famous under the name of the Eldorado. Beyond the main room was another supplied with tables, with here and there a close stall with a door for private drinking parties.

Captain Bluff led the way into the last of the stalls and shut the door behind him.

The man who had followed him and who had not left him unwatched for a second and turned swiftly upon him as the door shut.

"What kind of game do you call this?" he asked. "I have heard of cool plots in my time, but this one of yours out-Herods Herod!"

Claude Stacey's eyes blazed like the orbs of a maddened tiger.

He leaned toward the speaker with his sallow hands clinched till the fingers seemed lost in the palms.

He was rage itself.

"A game, eh?" he hissed. "You do well to call it a cool one, and, what is more, you don't want to interfere!"

"Not when—"

"No not when I am what I am!" interrupted the captain with increasing fierceness. "I didn't expect to see you here, but I am going on all the same!"

"That depends on me," was the defiant reply.

"I would like to know why it does?"

"I may show you."

"When?"

"To-night yet!"

"Not while I can prevent!"

"Then you will have to play fast."

The next answer was one which could not have been entirely unexpected.

"Suddenly grating his teeth, Claude Stacey flew straight at the man. He caught him midway between the door and the little drinking table, and succeeded in forcing him down upon the latter without much noise."

"Didn't you know I would stand no interference?" cried the captain to his enemy. "I have too much at stake to let a dead man trip me now! You should have beaten back all desire to take a hand in this bonanza game."

The man across the table said nothing.

In truth, he could not speak, for the knee of Captain Bluff was keeping him down, and his hands were at his throat!

Five minutes later one man left the stall and passed through the saloon to the street. Once on the pavement he disappeared, and several away he dropped a key into a sewer.

This man was Claude Stacey and Jordan was no longer at his heels.

Father Ferret's young friend had probably lost his quarry, and the captain's movements told that he might be difficult to pick up again in the future.

CHAPTER III.

BOWIE NOTCH.

We invite the reader from the streets of San Francisco to the hidden heart of the great gold range of California.

Deep among the mountains teeming with wealth yet undiscovered stood, at the date of our romance, a camp or mining town known as Bowie Notch.

Like all places of the kind, it had a history, but Bowie Notch had one more startling and peculiar than the others.

The camp had no near neighbors; it wanted none.

It stood on the site of what was known in certain circles as "the lost mines," a piece of land with a history half of which was legendary.

It was a history of mystery and crime with which we have nothing to do more than our story develops as it proceeds.

Bowie Notch was not large.

It did not boast of more than one hundred cabins.

It had an "alcalde," and a "queen."

The alcalde was called Flash Frank; the queen, Diamond Dora.

Bowie Notch was under the woman's sway, Flash Frank being a mere figure-head, alcalde by courtesy.

The woman was under thirty, if her looks spoke the truth, but there were men in the gold camp who knew she had passed that point.

Rather tall, with a perfectly-molded figure and graceful carriage, with a beautiful face and jet-black eyes, Diamond Dora, one of six women in camp, was a person to attract notice anywhere and under all circumstances.

This is the woman called Queen of Bowie Notch by Captain Bluff in Father Ferret's presence in San Francisco exactly one month before her present introduction to the reader.

She had not worn the title very long, for, as we already know, there was a time when she filled an entirely different station—in the household of Claude Stacey.

She was "the Vera Cruz Hecate," the mother of the missing Sybil, and the woman whose dagger at one time had sought the life of her California husband.

In Bowie Notch she was queen absolute.

Swayed by her mysterious beauty and power, and bound to her interests whatever they were by an oath of terrible import, the dusky pards of the gold camp wanted no other ruler.

It was not necessary to proclaim through the adjoining districts, as had been done, that Bowie Notch would receive no more people to citizenship. The oath of the banded pards and the character of their mistress were enough.

Just one month after Father Ferret's acceptance of the Captain Bluff commission, a man entered Bowie Notch despite the human embargo.

He was not remarkable in any respect, and the horse that carried him into camp appeared to be the richer of the two, for there were particles of gold dust in the tufts at his hocks.

"There's a chance to put the proclamation into effect!" cried an inhabitant as he caught sight of the stranger who rode toward a group of men gambling in the shade of a tree.

The crowd looked up.

"A tenderfoot, by gracious! No use to read the proclamation to him. Just hint that a document of the kind exists, and we'll see his critter's tail inside of a minute."

The little man came on and a minute later was touching his hat to the gamblers who were eying him with a good deal of suppressed merriment.

"Say, guv'nor, this ar' an exclusive camp!" laughed one.

"What's that?"

"A place for nobody but the elect which we ar', an' don't yer overlook it."

"This ar' Bowie Notch—which information may change yer mind," sung out another.

The man on horseback exhibited no change of color.

"Bowie Notch, eh? I've struck it rich, sure enough. Where might I find your whisky Eden, my friends?"

The men threw down their cards and would have rushed forward at the suggestion of a treat had not a tall man, over six feet, with deep-set gray eyes been seen approaching.

"Thar's ther alcalde!" exclaimed one.

"That walking Californy pine ar' Flash Frank, stranger."

The gold camp's visitor looked at the tall man as he came up, and not one of the players noticed that his deep blue eyes seemed to get a new expression.

The alcalde did not stop till he was at the saddle and his lengthy hand dropped lightly on the stranger's thigh.

"Your name, stranger?" he asked.

"Silas Sorrel."

"Whar from?"

"Walker River, and bound for Frisco."

"Do you know whar you ar'?"

"I do—in Bowie Notch."

"You ar' nowhar else. If you ar' goin' ter Frisco it is not necessary ter read ther mandate for your benefit."

"What mandate?"

"The one what says that we don't take any more citizens."

"Oho!" and Silas Sorrel exhibited some surprise. "It's that kind of a town, eh?"

"Yes."

"I don't intend ter stop long—over night, mebber, if you'll keep a chunk of humanity like me that long."

"We can do that," answered the tall alcalde. "We have no hotel in Bowie Notch; don't need any."

"Not with the kind of a law you keep on hand."

Flash Frank was turning away when a hand touched his shoulder, and looking back, he saw the new arrival leaning toward him.

"Do you ever lubricate, kurnel?" asked the blue-eyed man.

"I? No, sir!" spoke Flash Frank, with a dignity that drew smiles to the faces of the late gamblers. "Throw it into the sponges there—not into me," and away he went, eyed by the stranger in a manner that was amusing.

"Come along!" cried Sorrel to the group.

"There goes the only walking temperance platform I've struck since I left Walker. He never sold the sign he carries on his face, did he?" and the speaker laughed as he rode off guided by the men whose game his appearance had interrupted.

We will follow Flash Frank.

The sun, sinking behind the mountains, had thrown Bowie Notch in shadow when the stranger came. In a little while the hundred cabins would throw no shadows, and night would hold the gold camp in her grasp again.

The lank alcalde walked straight to a cabin that stood in the center of the mountain city.

It was distinguished from its neighbors by being larger and better built, and by having in front of it a little grass plot, with here and there a bush of mountain flowers.

The alcalde knocked lightly on the door partly ajar, and heard a voice on the inside invite him to enter.

The following moment Flash Frank found himself in the presence of the ruling spirit of the camp, a woman rather richly clad and reclining on a cot, with two tiny feet displayed by the shortness of her laced skirts.

"Bowie Notch has a visitor at last," exclaimed the alcalde.

"Has he come?" cried the woman, her eyes taking fire, as it were, by her own words.

"I do not know."

"What is he like?"

Flash Frank showed his teeth in a grin.

"I have not said that the visitor was a man," he remarked.

"But he is! Who else would come?—tell me!" and Diamond Dora leaned forward and caught the alcalde's arm. "No, you haven't announced the visitor's sex, but I guess it, don't I?"

The alcalde nodded.

"Now, what is this man like?"

"He is small, not very small either—"

"Ah! not tall and robust with dark eyes, Frank?"

"No, his eyes are blue."

"Light or dark?"

"Dark?"

"And smooth-faced?"

"No, he wears an iron-gray beard, not long, but long enough to show that he is pretty well up in years."

Diamond Dora went to the door and drew a paper from her bosom.

Flash Frank watched her unfold it and then lean forward to read its contents in the fading light.

He was not near enough to look over the woman's shoulder, nor to see the following words in coarse writing on the paper:

"Height about five feet three inches; weight 150 pounds. Hair nearly white, eyes dark blue, face smooth, hands darker than face. Age about sixty, but doesn't look it."

Diamond Dora read this description with a minuteness that rendered Flash Frank impatient.

"Have you got that man down to a hair?" he asked, as the woman turned toward him.

"I don't know," she laughed.

"Where is he?"

"He took the boys down to *La Paradiso*, or rather they took him."

"What does he want here?"

"He comes from Walker River and goes to Frisco."

"Isn't it a little out of the way, Flash—just a little?"

There was a streak of sarcasm in the woman's voice.

"It isn't a crow line," was the answer.

"No! I want to see this man."

"When?"

"Right away."

"Oh, he isn't the big man you hate," cried Frank. "I can tell you that. If he war, I'd hev said so in the beginning."

"I know he isn't *that* man," was the quick answer. "He can never be him if he is small as you say. But I want to see him all the same. You remember the oath, Frank. You will go with me down to *La Paradiso*. Five or ten of the boys will be there—enough, if I have any commands for them."

"Do you expect to issue any?" asked the alcalde in astonishment.

"There is no telling what might happen. If circumstances force me to act, I will have work for the Banded Pardos of Bowie Notch. They must not forget their wild oath; they must stand by their queen."

"They'll do it," cried the alcalde. "There will be a dozen at least at *La Paradiso*."

"Then we go thither at once. I don't want my revolvers. If this interloper is to be met, Bowie Notch will do it under my eye."

"Something is to happen; I know it," murmured the tall alcalde, as he followed the Gold-Camp Queen from the cabin. "This may be the opening of the big game she says is to be played some day. But that man at *La Paradiso*—pshaw! He isn't a mouthful!"

It was not far to the rough saloon which rejoiced in the name already mentioned, and before the twain reached it they heard coarse and jolly voices on the inside.

Diamond Dora and the alcalde exchanged quick glances.

"Shall I enter first?" asked the tall sport.

"That honor is mine," responded the woman with a quick flash of her jet-black eyes, and the next moment she crossed the threshold.

It was night beyond the door of *La Paradiso*; its three lamps illumined the entire place.

At the bar stood a group of dark-shirted, bronzed men, a dozen in number.

The central figure was a person much smaller in stature—the man who had entered the camp on horseback as Silas Sorrel.

At sight of Diamond Dora, one of the group uttered her name in a loud voice, and the whole set turned.

"That's our queen, stranger. Ain't she a mountain daisy in full bloom?"

The crowd, as if by common consent, drew back from the stranger and left him alone.

"Ho! this is the man, is it?" said the Queen of Bowie Notch, as she tripped forward with a glance at the man, and the next moment in the midst of profound silence she was looking into Silas Sorrel's eyes.

The scrutiny did not last long—not so much as twenty seconds.

Diamond Dora's eyes got a vivid flash as she stepped back.

"That is the man!" she cried, leveling a finger at Silas Sorrel. "He isn't the giant for whom I've been looking, but he is more dangerous. Silas Sorrel, eh? His name, for a thousand, is Father Ferret, the California detective, and my commands are, Pardos of Bowie Notch, that he be shot dead in his tracks! *Mountain tigers, do your duty!*"

CHAPTER IV.

THE RESPITE.

If the man who stood before Diamond Dora's outstretched hand and the clicking revolvers of the Pardos of Bowie Notch, was Father Ferret, he did not seem in any haste to betray himself.

On the contrary, he stood erect, his small figure a striking contrast to the giant forms of the men who confronted him. His deep-blue eyes showed no signs of fear; in the presence of death he was as calm as a summer's day.

"Do you deny it?" suddenly asked the Queen of Bowie Notch, her voice changing slightly as she leaned forward. "Haven't I fully unmasked you, Father Ferret, hired detective, and trailer, as you are? Where's your master? Did you leave him in Frisco, too cowardly to come himself? You haven't lost your tongue, but I am losing my patience, and the fingers of the best bloods in California are at the trigger!"

The respite granted by the woman's words was a breathing spell for the man who calmly faced the mob.

"So I am Father Ferret, am I?" he asked at length.

"You are."

"You know it?"

"I have proof positive!" cried Diamond Dora. "You are not an unexpected visitor. I thought you would come some time in some disguise. It was only a question of time. A month ago you engaged yourself to a man who calls himself Major Montooth. The bargain was closed at the Occidental Hotel in Frisco. You see that I am not too poor to employ spies," and the Queen of Bowie Notch smiled.

"Very well; if you know so much it is useless for me to deny anything," replied the man. "I suppose I could not convince you that I am not Father Ferret."

"Not if the oath were taken on a thousand Bibles!" exclaimed the Gold-Camp Queen.

"Then I will not protest that this is a case of mistaken identity."

Diamond Dora broke into a derisive laugh.

"Ha! is *that* the game?" she cried. "Mistaken identity, is it? We will sift this thing to the bottom before Bowie Notch deals with you. Men, we won't finish this fellow now. You will conduct him to the alcalde's shanty, and guard him till further orders. I shall prove him a liar to his own satisfaction, and then we'll whisk him out of this game. Take him away!"

The queen of the gold town waved her hand toward the door, and stepped aside.

"If he attempts flight, shoot him in his tracks!" she continued to the rough men as they laid hold of the prisoner, and then with eyes fixed upon him, she saw him marched through the door into the street.

"Jocko Bill, you've been everywhere almost," she cried wheeling suddenly upon the dark-visaged man who stood behind the counter of *La Paradiso*. "Tell me, did you ever see that man before?"

The man of the whisky den shook his head.

"You've been to the eastern cities?"

"Yes."

"You've been hunted out of Chicago, St. Louis, Denver and Frisco?"

Jocko Bill showed his teeth in his reply.

"Hunted, but never caught, queen."

"You told me once that your most persistent tracker was a little man, pretty well up in years and called the Ferret."

"That's what they called him."

"And this is not the man?"

"He don't look like him."

The Queen of Bowie Notch showed her disappointment, in her looks, but only for a moment.

"I'll prove it before morning, or I am desperately mistaken!" she exclaimed.

"Do you *have* to prove it?" asked Jocko Bill with a significant leer.

"No, but I want to show him that I know!" was the answer. "I am convinced that this is the man who gave you trouble—"

"If I had thought so, you would have faced a dead man!" was the interruption. "Prove to me that this man is the Ferret and the boys won't have to carry out your orders."

"You don't want to interfere," spoke Diamond Dora with some sternness, and her hand creeping over the counter fell softly upon the barkeeper's wrist. "I want it distinctly understood that I am playing this game—I—alone."

"I understand."

"No interference! This man has come here for a purpose. I know it. He has walked straight into the warmest nest he ever saw. He came from a man who dare not come himself; but the play they have made shall end in the swift eclipse of a human life!"

The Queen of Bowie Notch turned toward the door.

"See here!" called Jocko Bill after her. "If this man is the Ferret you don't want to give him any rope."

"Not an inch!" answered the dark-eyed woman.

Diamond Dora went straight to her cabin.

"My God! must I fight to keep the prize I've won?" she cried, throwing herself for a moment upon the cot from which she had been aroused by the alcalde. "I find pitted against me a man who is called the shrewdest detective of the coast. I have been warned by my Frisco agent, ever-faithful Dom Pablo, and the human bloodhound is here—here! and thank God! in my power!"

The woman seemed transformed to another person with a tiger's nature as she sprung up with flaming eyes and clinched hands.

"There must be no failure, but who knows what will happen?" she went on after a long breath. "I've got to guard against it. I must do it now. Where is Flash Frank?"

She was about to leave the cabin when the door was suddenly opened, and the tall figure of the alcalde came in.

"The man I want!" cried the Queen of Bowie Notch, springing toward her visitor. "You're always on hand when wanted, ain't you, Frank?"

"Always!" smiled the alcalde.

"Where is the man from Frisco?"

"In my shanty."

"Guarded?"

"Watched by Big Burt and six pardos."

"A sufficient guarantee that he is safe."

"Surrounded by a ring of steel, Queen Dora. What's the next order?"

"Listen to me," and the woman lowered her voice. "You go to *her* cabin—at once, alcalde."

"Well?"

"You go with two horses—one for yourself—the other for *her*."

Frank gave the woman a look of amazement. A question was at his lips.

Queen Dora saw this and smiled.

"What were you going to say?" she asked.

"I'm puzzled. Why all this if you consider the man called Father Ferret completely at your mercy, as I believe him to be?"

"I want to make doubly sure of safety. He must not see *her*."

"How can he if you lift your finger to Big Burt and his guards?"

"Ah! Frank let me have my way!" cried Dora. "You will go to the cabin with two horses?"

"Yes."

"You will tell the girl that danger threatens her, that it is my wish that she leaves camp with you immediately. That will be enough for her to know. She will not hesitate."

"Whither shall I take her?"

"You will carry out the instructions I gave you, some years ago. You have not forgotten them, Frank?"

"I never forget anything."

"Good!" cried the woman. "Now go and get the horses. The time has come for you to carry out those old orders. Do your duty and do it well."

"What is to happen while I am away?" asked the alcalde.

"I am going to play a strong hand."

"Against the man at my shanty?"

"Against the tracker employed by Claude

Stacey's gold!" exclaimed the queen. "You will be back to-morrow."

"But too late to witness your throw, eh?" "I think so—too late!" laughed the woman.

Frank walked to the door and with one of his bronze hands at the wooden latch threw a passionate look over his shoulder.

"When is my answer to come, Queen Dora?" he asked.

"When I am ready to give it—not a moment before!" answered the woman harshly, and then as she saw a deep shadow of disappointment settle over her alcalde's thin face, she sprung forward and continued in a softer tone: "Obey me, Frank; do your duty like a man and the answer will be along one of these days."

Instantly the shadow left the alcalde's face, his eyes got a new light, and with a thankful look at Diamond Dora he opened the door and sprung into the street.

Was there love between the two?

"Frank will carry out my command to the letter!" cried the queen. "The girl may wonder why this sudden flight, but the alcalde will not enlighten her. Jocko Bill does not recognize in my prisoner the man who hounded him from city to city a few years ago, yet the two must be the same person. My Frisco spy cannot be deceived! Now let me try one other person. If she fails to recognize Father Ferret, I will proceed with my hand."

Diamond Dora left the cabin and went out into the night. Overhead the sky was studded with stars, but she saw them not. She threw a swift glance toward the alcalde's cabin and a gleam of triumph shone in the depths of her lustrous eyes.

"Who says this is not my hour?" he ejaculated. "The man under guard down yonder knows by this time that there are death nooses for detectives in the realm of Diamond Dora!"

She passed swiftly down the main street of Bowie Notch until she reached a cabin somewhat smaller than her own, and the last one but three on the irregular thoroughfare.

"Here is my witness," she exclaimed going up to the door. "If Jocko Bill does not recognize the prisoner the person in this cabin will! If he is Father Ferret or Frederick Fergus as he is called when not on a human trail, he will be identified by one who dare not evade the truth."

The next moment the Queen of Bowie Notch was rapping at the door.

There came no answer.

Then the caller opened the door softly and went in.

The room was dark.

"Fanny?" she called in tones slightly above a loud whisper.

No reply.

"Fanny? It is I—Dora!"

Silence as before.

The queen of the gold camp moved forward and found a bed, with her hands.

The next moment she started back with an exclamation of horror.

"Merciful heavens! Is my witness dead?"

Then the cabin was brightened by the flash of a match.

CHAPTER V.

"YOUR WIFE IS DEAD!"

"WHAT is this—murder or suicide?" cried the Queen of Bowie Notch as she bent over the figure of a woman that lay stretched on the couch before her.

The match burning in the queen's hand revealed a face distorted by pain, and a pair of wildly staring eyes.

For all this there was a good deal of beauty about the ghastly picture, for in life the dead woman must have had her full share of it.

Diamond Dora gazed on the face until her match showed signs of going out, then she touched it to the wick of a little lamp on a table near by and soon had a more permanent light.

"Faro Fan will never stand before the man in the alcalde's cabin to confirm my charge that he is Father Ferret the California detective. She was well awhile before sunset, but she is dead now. What brought about this sudden change? There is some mystery here!"

The queen of the camp began to search the room for something definite concerning the cause of Faro Fan's death.

She did not know why the woman should take her own life, if she had done this.

Everybody knew Faro Fan, or thought they did.

She was a little past forty, but never looked beyond five-and-twenty. She had led a checkered life, glimpses of which had been afforded Diamond Dora on several occasions since the dead woman's coming to the Notch.

The camp queen had learned that she knew the man called Father Ferret, that once, at least in her life, she had met the gold-camp spotter. Hence Dora's eagerness to bring the two faces to face.

It could yet be done, but one of the pair, her intended witness, would not be living.

The dead woman lay in such a position that

her left hand was hidden between the bed and the rough wall of the cabin. It was the last place where Diamond Dora looked.

As she lifted the dead hand she started, and gave vent to a cry of discovery.

"I have found something!" she cried. "Faro Fan has left a record of some kind behind," and then the queen began to loosen a piece of paper held tightly by the stiffened fingers of the dead.

A moment later, with excited eyes and wildly beating heart, Dora was reading something at the lamp.

The silence of death reigned within the cabin, as well it might, for within reach of a human hand Faro Fan lay motionless.

"What is this?" ejaculated Queen Dora, as her eyes went down the crinkled paper. "My God! this is one of the secrets she kept to the last!"

It did not take the woman very long to master the document before her, and when she reached the bottom she had read the following:

"To whoever comes:—There has come to Bowie Notch a man who has found my trail at last. All my hiding for years has availed me nothing; this man-ferret has scouted me out. I know what his triumph will be if he finds me alive, which he shall not do! I swear in the sight of Heaven, before whose awful bar I shall soon appear, that I have not made way with his child. I am guilty of child-theft, but not of murder; but he would not believe me. Sooner than meet him I take my own life. The poison I have kept so long for an emergency of this kind will do its work. He will find me when it shall be too late for him to wreak his vengeance. He will curse me from the depths of his heart; he will accuse me of murder, but he will not say that Faro Fan of Bowie Notch was the California spotter's wife! This is the secret I have kept from Diamond Dora, and from the whole camp; but I can't die with it locked in my bosom. The man is here; he came for me. Let him take his wife, if he will."

"FARO FAN."

It is not strange that the queen of the gold camp should reach the end of this startling confession breathless and pale.

Here was something totally unlooked for; here was a confession that would electrify Bowie Notch.

Faro Fan, Father Ferret's wife?

It was a thunderbolt.

Clutching the paper madly, Diamond Dora picked up the lamp and held it over the occupant of the cot.

"They say women can't keep a secret, but what did this one do?" she exclaimed. "She shall still be my witness. I will make the dead sustain my charge. I will first see Father Ferret, and then Bowie Notch will learn who Faro Fan was. Let me get at this California man-hunter! I am eager to show him that here, deep in the gold-hills, my reign is absolute. His new trail ends almost before it has begun!"

Queen Dora set the lamp down and extinguished it, and the next moment she was once more in the street of Bowie Notch.

The paper found clutched in the dead woman's hand was in her possession and where she could reach it in a second.

A few yards away several stalwart figures were planted like statues in front of a certain cabin.

These were Big Burt and his pards, the guard set about the man called Father Ferret.

There were more about the same shanty.

In the hand of each was held ready for use a heavy six-shooter, and the grim visages of the mountain guards told that they would be used at their queen's command, or before, if necessary.

The woman who came up to the men in front of the cabin did so with a light step.

The most powerful of the men leaned forward and uttered an exclamation at sight of her.

"Is he here yet?" asked Dora, eagerly.

Big Burt nodded toward the cabin while his dark eyes flashed his report.

"I want to see him," continued the Queen of Bowie Notch. "I've got news for Father Ferret."

The stalwart captain of the guard turned toward the hut and his men followed him to the door.

Diamond Dora exhibited her eagerness by her eyes. She was impatient to get inside.

As the door was pushed opened by Big Burt she stepped across the threshold, and was the first to see the tenant of the alcalde's cabin.

The lamp which had been left burning on the table at Big Burt's command showed her Silas Sorrel, or Father Ferret, as she called him, reclining on Flash Ferret's bed with his eyes fixed upon his visitors.

"I am back again, Father Ferret!" cried the Queen of Bowie Notch springing forward. "I have great news for you."

The man on the cot did not exhibit any curiosity. His eyes met the triumphant blaze of Queen Dora's orbs with the coolness of a person under admirable control.

"Maybe you don't want any news!" the woman went on. "Whether you want it or not, Father Ferret, you are going to get it in the presence of these men."

"Your wife is dead!"

Diamond Dora made this announcement in a tragic manner. She spoke in tones calculated to have a startling effect on the man for whose ears they were intended.

"My wife?" echoed Silas Sorrel with a smile

at the corners of his mouth. "What do you mean?"

It was Dora who was the astonished party. She recoiled with a light cry.

Was this man playing?

Could it be that Faro Fan's confession was a fiction, that the mysterious beauty of Bowie Notch had gone to her death deceived?

"I mean that your wife is dead. She died to-night!" cried Diamond Dora returning to the charge. "I have just come from the body. You cannot look me down, Father Ferret. You dare not say that Faro Fan of Bowie Notch was not the woman whom you accuse of murdering the child."

"What child?"

This was exasperating, and the queen of the gold camp felt it to be so.

All at once she brought the confession from its hiding place. It was a charge which no one could refute; it was the confession of the dead!

"Here! read this!" she cried, snatching the lamp from the table as she thrust the paper into the prisoner's face. "This is the voice of the dead—the woman who took her own life to-night because you came to Bowie Notch."

Silas Sorrel took the document.

The crowd of bronze men leaned forward, their fingers within the trigger-guards of their deadly weapons, that rested against their limbs.

The breath of the woman, the mistress of all, came thick and fast.

She watched the prisoner read the confession with eyes that were ready to catch every expression.

The man called Father Ferret read without a movement of betrayal.

"I'm sorry," he said, looking up into the faces of those above him. "That woman acted without judgment."

Diamond Dora could not suppress a startling cry.

"What! do you deny that confession?" she exclaimed.

"I do."

"She was not your wife?"

"She was not."

"But she says she was. Do you think a woman like that would take her life and leave a written lie behind?"

"I don't know. Do you want this paper?"

And the man handed the paper toward Diamond Dora, whose hand seemed to shrink from taking it.

Was the test to fail?

The men exchanged singular glances over the woman's head. They appeared to believe that the prisoner was not the California detective.

Dora had failed.

For several seconds the Queen of Bowie Notch looked in astonishment at the man whose coolness had almost driven her mad.

"I won't believe it!" she murmured. "My spy, Dom Pablo, knows better than to send a false report. I have a description of this man. Beyond doubt he is Father Ferret, the man hired by Claude Stacey to solve the mystery of Sybil's fate, and to run me down. This man before me is he. He denies Faro Fan's confession with the coolness of Satan. I thought it would force him to betray himself."

Diamond Dora drew back at last and replaced the lamp on the table.

"We will see how long you will play this silent hand," she said to herself, and then turning to Silas Sorrel, she went on in stern tones:

"The game is up, Father Ferret. Within an hour the California detective in Claude Stacey's pay will be a corpse! You will have a short time in which to prepare for death. This is not Frisco with its thousand and one avenues of escape. You are in Bowie Notch, and the hands of its queen are turned against mercy. We will meet once more—when your time is up!"

The queen of the gold camp stepped back and motioned the men to follow her out.

"That man is mystery itself," she exclaimed to Big Burt when she turned upon him in the starlight.

"Couldn't you be mistaken, Queen Dora?" ventured the captain of the death guard.

"Mistaken? no!" was the quick response. "And if I were, I would not revoke the sentence now. You will watch that man closer than ever from this moment. When I return he dies, and as Father Ferret, for a thousand!"

With doubts in his look Big Burt watched the figure of the Queen of Bowie Notch until the shadows dropped between them, and then returned to his vigils over the man in the alcalde's cabin.

"I guess she didn't get anything out of me!" muttered the prisoner with a quiet twinkle in his deep blue eyes when he was alone. "I took all the chances when I came here on this big hunt, and I'll take 'em yet. Jordan isn't far away, the keen young fox, and he may be heard from when needed. So the woman committed suicide because I came? She needn't to have done that, for I am after other game. Let me see: I have about an hour of grace. It isn't the first death sentence Father Ferret has heard. And the man fell back on the cot and shut his eyes!"

CHAPTER VI.

GETTING AT THE PAST.

FLASH FRANK the tall alcalde was accustomed to obey Diamond Dora in everything, and when she commanded him to conduct a certain young girl from Bowie Notch, he resolved to do so.

This young person called Sybil once by the Gold-Camp Queen, as we have heard, occupied a cabin not far from Dora's, and her eyes opened with surprise when the alcalde suddenly appeared and briefly stated his errand.

"What! leave Bowie Notch to-night—now?" cried the young girl who was beautiful with her deep brown eyes and perfect face and figure.

"Them's the orders," replied Flash Frank.

"What has happened?"

"I don't know. I never ask."

"No," exclaimed Sybil. "I know you never question Queen Dora's commands. You'd take the trail to perdition if she said so and never ask why, wouldn't you, Flash Frank?"

The alcalde showed his teeth in a smile.

"Must I go?" and Sybil came up to the alcalde and laid her hand upon his arm. "Can't I stay here, just for a little while?"

"I'd like to serve you, but them's not the orders," was the curt answer. "Get ready. I've got the animals outside."

"Oh, you are going with me."

"I am."

"All the way?"

"Yes."

Sybil made no reply, but began to prepare for the forced journey.

She had few preparations to make, and Flash Frank went outside and stood at the horses' heads while she got ready.

His eyes got a gleam of satisfaction when he found Sybil before him.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Ready, but not very willing," smiled the girl. "How long is the journey?"

"Not very long."

The next minute the girl was in the saddle, and the Alcalde of Bowie Notch was mounted alongside.

The two rode slowly down the wide cabin-lined street of the gold camp, and passed out among the dark mountains.

On the girl's face was a look of much curiosity.

What meant this sudden flight by night?

Flash Frank had told her that it was Diamond Dora's orders, but why had she issued them?

More than once the girl leaned forward and tried to study the sharp face at her side, but the scrutiny gave her no clew.

The Alcalde of Bowie Notch was a man about whom rested an atmosphere of mystery.

Sybil who had known him for years had never solved him rightly, and now with orders from the Gold-Camp Queen to take her, she knew not where, he was more a mystery than ever.

Several miles were soon placed between the twain and the camp where Diamond Dora was playing her hand against the man called Father Ferret.

Sybil knew nothing of this. Unlike Faro Fan, the suicide, she had not seen the California detective enter the camp.

"Flash Frank, I want you to listen to me," the girl suddenly exclaimed, and the alcalde started at the touch of her hand.

"I can't. It's ag'in' orders."

"What care I for your orders?" the girl went on in a determined strain. "You shall hear what I have to say."

There was no reply.

The lips of the alcalde met firmly, and his gaze wandered ahead.

"Something has happened in Bowie Notch—something that concerns me," continued Sybil. "You are obeying orders, Flash Frank; I don't blame you. But you must tell me several things which I have yearned to know. In the first place, is Diamond Dora any blood kin of mine?"

Sybil saw the alcalde start again.

"Girl, I can't tell you anything," he exclaimed, as their eyes met.

"Because it is against orders, eh?"

"That's it, precisely!"

"To the wind with your orders! I have a right to know this thing. I am no longer a child. I have submitted to the rule of the Queen of Bowie Notch, hoping that she would tell me something one of these days; but I have hoped in vain. This forces me to appeal to you. I will take an oath never to reveal the source of my information. Diamond Dora will never know that you talked. Now tell me. Is she any blood kin of mine?"

Flash Frank saw the intense eagerness that filled the eyes of the beautiful speaker. There was an irresistible plea in Sybil's tones.

"I'm sorry, but it's ov no use, girl," he answered.

Sybil drew back and looked at him.

"You won't talk?"

"It's ag'in' orders!"

The girl was seen to bite her lips.

"You intend to carry out *her* command to the letter," she went on, her spirit aroused. "You won't help me to a solution of my early life, which is a strange and mysterious blank to me. You won't say who Queen Dora is; you

refuse to tell me whither I am being conducted, and if I were to tell you to explain the serpent tattoo on my arm, you would make the same answer—that orders forbade!"

Flash Frank looked at the girl, but made no reply.

Was the information about the tattoo new to him?

Sybil was unable to determine.

"Very well; keep your lips sealed on that subject!" she cried. "Let me try you again. Who came to camp to-night?"

"Nobody."

"Who is expected?"

"The same person."

"Come! you are a sphinx when you want to be!" ejaculated Sybil. "I would not be suddenly ordered from Bowie Notch if nobody had come. You know that, Flash Frank, and so do I. Diamond Dora told me no longer than a week ago, that I would not get among the mountains for some time. She was not expecting anything of this kind *then*. *Something has turned up since*, and nobody knows that better than the Alcalde of Bowie Notch."

"You don't want to tell me. No; you are carrying out the orders of the woman who keeps me near her for a purpose of some kind. Do you think that your faithfulness will finally conquer her, Flash Frank?"

The tall alcalde turned quickly and looked at the girl.

"What's that?" he cried.

"You love Diamond Dora," exclaimed Sybil, with a smile.

"I?"

"Alcalde Frank, of Bowie Notch, I've had my eyes about me all the time," the girl went on. "She is hard to woo, isn't she? And you are waiting for a command you may never get."

"What command is that?"

"A command to become the king of this gold city. Ha! ha! Flash Frank, when did you last ask the Queen of Bowie to let you hope?"

The angular face of the slim alcalde was a study, as Sybil could see by the light of the stars overhead.

She had perplexed Flash Frank, and he had betrayed his feelings for the woman called Diamond Dora.

"Why couldn't you let me help you on with this courtship?" the girl went on. "You get along so slow, Alcalde Frank. Bowie Notch needs a match maker, seems to me."

"What could you do?" and Flash Frank leaned suddenly toward his companion.

"I could help you out, maybe, but you won't trust me. It's against orders, you know," and the girl's silvery laugh awoke the echoes of the mountain trail.

"Hush!" cried the alcalde, catching her arm in the midst of the laugh, "these mountains may have ears."

"Then you don't want them to hear about your love-making?"

"No."

"Very well; as I'm not accepted as a mediator, we'll let the wooing get along as best it can; but I'm going back to Bowie."

"When?"

"Now!"

The alcalde darted the girl a quick look.

"You are not," he said; "but, on the contrary, you are going with me."

"Not to-night, Flash Frank. I have come this far for the purpose of getting at a certain mystery, if possible. But your adherence to orders gives me no satisfaction. You won't tell me what I am to Diamond Dora, and I have lived long enough without knowing. You may sit there in your saddle and look at me, but I am going back to Bowie Notch."

Flash Frank saw that the girl was resolute, and when with the last word, she suddenly drew her horse off he threw out his hand.

"You don't want to keep me!" she cried, firmly. "To let me go will not be disobedience of orders. I am going, anyhow! Keep off, Alcalde Frank. I intend to make this night solve the mystery of my life!"

"Not while I'm hyer!" exclaimed the alcalde.

"In spite of you!" cried Sybil.

The next second the master of Bowie Notch recoiled from a leveled revolver behind which were the glowing eyes of the gold-camp girl.

"Not for all the gold in these hills would I take your life, Flash Frank, but there is something worth more than gold that moves me now. I am going straight to Bowie Notch, and into the presence of its queen. I happen to know, ask me not how I discovered it, that I am in years my own mistress now. What I have asked for I can now demand."

The alcalde looked over the revolver for a moment and then glanced down the trail.

"You will drop me if I interfere?" he asked.

"I will!"

"Then go to Bowie Notch! Face Queen Dora and tell her, if she asks, that the man who disobeyed her commands will never come back for more!"

"Just as you please!" exclaimed the girl.

"Good-night, Flash Frank."

"Good-by!"

The alcalde drew his horses near to the moun-

tain wall and watched Sybil with compressed lips as she turned and rode back.

"Now for the solution of my life mystery!" passed between her teeth. "Flash Frank will be at Dora's feet before morning asking pardon. His passion is too deep to let him stay away."

The girl did not draw rein until she found herself among the cabins of the gold camp.

A singular silence had fallen about them, and their tenants appeared to be wrapped in slumber.

With resolute mien Sybil rode on until she drew up in front of a cabin beyond whose window appeared the rays of a lamp.

"I am at the palace!" she ejaculated as she alighted. "Now I shall astonish the Queen of Bowie with a single question."

A moment later Sybil was at the door and her hand was lifted to knock, when it opened suddenly.

The waif of Bowie Notch recoiled with a cry. Diamond Dora stood before her.

The meeting, totally unexpected, was an astonishment to both.

The Queen of Bowie grew suddenly pale and fell back, while an ejaculation of amazement parted her lips.

"You!—you here?" she suddenly cried, coming forward in a second. "I thought I sent you away—with Frank, the alcalde!"

She was leaning forward with eagerness and displeasure in her black eyes, and with her handsome figure in a quiver.

"So you did, but I am back!" exclaimed Sybil. "I want to meet you in your house, Diamond Dora."

"You shall!" was the answer.

In another instant Sybil was beyond the door, in the lamplight, and facing the Queen of Bowie.

"In God's name, tell me one thing!" she cried. "Are you my mother?"

CHAPTER VII.

DOM PABLO THE DARK.

"AM I your mother?" exclaimed the Queen of Bowie Notch, when the strange interrogation that concludes our last chapter fell in startling accents from Sybil's tongue.

"Yes, my mother," repeated the young girl.

"Are you she?"

A smile appeared at Diamond Dora's lips.

"What makes you think so, child?" she asked.

"More than I can explain," was the reply. "You sent me out of Bowie to-night under the care and protection of Alcalde Frank. You thought I would go without a word, but I have come back for the truth."

"Where is the traitor alcalde?" cried the mountain queen, with clinched hands.

"No traitor! Flash Frank let me go because I got the drop on him, and declared my intention of coming back."

"Where is he now?"

"He is off for other fields."

"Has he deserted Bowie?"

"He is gone for good."

And Sybil looked close to note the effect of this announcement.

"Let him go!" Dora said, after a moment's silence. "This man was a pest."

"He loved you."

"Pshaw! He said so, but *he* can love nobody," laughed the Gold-Camp Queen; and then she took a step forward, and would have seized the girl's arm if she had not drawn back.

"So you want to know something about your parentage, eh?" Dora exclaimed.

"I do."

"Why didn't you seek this information before?"

"I had promised myself that I would not until I was of age. I was eighteen yesterday."

Diamond Dora uttered a cry of surprise.

"How do you know that, girl?"

"Never mind. I am eighteen and you know it. Now let me have the truth. Are you my mother?"

The Queen of Bowie Notch was about to make answer of some kind when the cabin door was opened by some one from without, and the next instant a man very dark of skin with intensely black eyes that glittered stood before the two women.

"Dom Pablo!" cried Diamond Dora, springing joyfully toward the new-comer, while Sybil maintained her position and fixed her eyes upon him.

"I don't like this interruption," murmured the girl. "And I never liked this half Indian who has been playing spy some where for Dora. He comes when I wish he was at the end of the earth; but he shall not keep the secret from me."

The person called Dom Pablo in the camp queen's hasty exclamation came in with excitement in his dancing eyes.

He gave evidences of having just arrived at Bowie Notch for there was dust on his clothes, and whitish hairs on his leggings.

He had not been long from the saddle.

"What is the news, Pablo?" asked Queen Dora, eagerly as she seized the half-breed's hands.

Dom Pablo glanced at Sybil.

"No, no, not here!" whispered Diamond Dora, interpreting the glance. "You can keep silence for a while, can't you, Pablo?"

"For a while," echoed the swarthy spy, and then added in a lower whisper still: "I have news. It is important!"

With a final look at her agent Dora dropped the hands and turned to the girl.

"I can't answer you now," he said. "I want to see this man. He has just come in with important news for me. Go to your house and wait till I come or send for you."

"When will that be?"

"Soon—soon!" cried Dora, impatient to get the girl away.

Sybil hesitated.

"If I go it will give her time to collect her forces," she thought. "I had her at the door of a confession when the spy came. I hate Dom Pablo the Dark for this interference. Shall I go?"

"Go, girl!" cried Dora, suddenly clutching Sybil's arm. "Leave me alone with this man for a while."

"Remember! I will repeat the demand!" replied the girl, fixing her eyes upon the Queen of Bowies. "As there is a God in heaven, I will know the truth and all of it. You will be ready to answer me when we meet again?"

"I will answer! Go!—go!" and Sybil was pushed toward the door which the dark hand of Dom Pablo opened, and she was out in the night with a bewildered brain!

For a moment after the girl's sudden departure Diamond Dora and her spy stood face to face speechless. The woman seemed to forget the half-breed's presence. Her thoughts were with the girl.

"I thought you were eager for news," suddenly spoke Dom Pablo, showing his teeth.

Diamond Dora was called back to the present by the sound of his voice.

"News? yes! what have you? Tell me! Heavens! I have news for you, but your news first."

Again the hand of the camp queen caught the half-breed's arm, and her distended eyes were emphasizing her disjoined sentences.

"Well, he has left Frisco," said Pablo.

"I know that; he is here under sentence of death."

The dark-faced spy uttered a strange cry.

"When did he come?" he asked.

"Near sundown. Ah! your description, sent ahead, enabled me to recognize him."

"My description?" echoed the half-breed. "I sent none of him."

"Have you forgotten?" cried Queen Dora. "Don't you know that you wrote 'eight five feet three, dark blue eyes'?"

"Satan's snuff-box!" interrupted Dom Pablo. "That is my description of Father Ferret, the Gold-Camp Detective. I am talking now about the other!"

A dash of pallor crossed the woman's face.

"The other? Do you mean—"

"Claude Stacey!"

The Queen of Bowie Notch recoiled and stared at the man before her.

"This man left Frisco for good ten days ago," continued Dom Pablo. "He grew uneasy about his trailer from whom there came no report. He is on the trail himself."

"Bound for Bowie Notch?"

"That is to be found out," replied Pablo the Dark with a smile. "Are you afraid of this once lord of yours, Queen Dora?"

The woman started forward, and the next moment drew her perfect figure proudly up before the half-breed whom she met with flashing eyes.

"Afraid of him now?" she exclaimed. "There was a time, perhaps, when I accounted Claude Stacey my master, but now as Queen of Bowie Notch, and intrenched against any foe, I fear him not! His tool is in my hands, and as I have told you, under sentence of death. Father Ferret has less than an hour to live. I am prepared for Claude Stacey. Who is with him?"

"His man Falcon."

"Something for you to do, Dom Pablo!" laughed Queen Dora. "What has he been doing all this time in Frisco?"

"Hiding for a while from a new crime—"

"What did he do?"

"Nothing, only choked a man so severely that he deprived him of reason. It was the same night he struck the bargain with Father Ferret. The choking took place in a saloon called the Eldorado. At any rate, Captain Bluff and a man who resembled him somewhat were seen to enter the place; they took a private stall. After the lapse of a few minutes the captain came out and went away."

"Satan's snuff-box! Nobody seemed to remember that two men had entered the stall together. Several hours afterward they heard a noise in the stall. A man in there groaned. They opened the door by breaking a lock, for Captain Bluff had taken the key away, and found a man on the floor. He had no wounds on him though he was supposed to be nearly dead, but there were dark finger-marks at his throat. *Cristo!* somebody had given him a terrible choking!"

"Who was the man?"

The woman's impatience would not let the half-breed get quietly to the end of his story.

"Nobody knows. He was taken from the Eldorado to the hospital; from the hospital to the insane asylum."

Diamond Dora could not suppress an exclamation.

"All through Claude Stacey's fingers!"

Dom Pablo the Dark nodded as he smiled.

"I know those fingers! I felt their power once," laughed the Queen of Bowie Notch, and then her thoughts went back to the incident at the Eldorado.

"Was there no arrest?"

"They could not find the tiger-captain," replied Dom Pablo. "His victim could tell nothing, and the last seen of the throttler was when he walked out of the Eldorado with the man left for dead in the stall."

"But the man, his victim, has talked since?" cried Dora, eagerly.

"Not a word that has any meaning."

"What do the doctors say?"

"It is hope—hope," answered the half-breed, smiling again.

"You have seen his victim?"

"Fifty times."

"Well?"

"He looks something like Claude, but he is not quite so tall, and his eyes seem to be a shade lighter."

Dora was silent.

There had come over her suddenly a singular interest in the man choked into madness by the frenzied hand of Captain Bluff.

Dom Pablo noticed it, but did not speak.

"I wish you could have brought me something about this man," she spoke, looking into the half-breed's eyes. "You say, though, that Claude Stacey left Frisco ten days ago with his shadow Falcon?"

"Yes."

"He left because Father Ferret has sent him no satisfactory report."

"That is true."

"And Father Ferret was sent to find Sybil?"

"Yes."

A smile of triumph suddenly lit up Diamond Dora's face.

"Well, he has not accomplished his mission!" she exclaimed. "And, what is more, Dom Pablo, he never will! Claude Stacey and his Mexican may come here. I hope they will! I am prepared to play out any game they want to inaugurate. The prize never goes back into his hands, or, if she goes there, it will be lifeless. Just before you came, the girl asked me if I were her mother. I wonder who put that into her head? I sent her out of sight for a purpose with Flash Frank, but she came back alone to throw the question into my teeth. Now, Pablo, you will go with me to the man waiting for death in the alcalde's cabin. Father Ferret's hour is up. After him we will pay our respects to Claude Stacey and Falcon. This is still Bowie Notch, and Diamond Dora has not been deposed!"

Dom Pablo the Dark had a cunning and eager look in the depths of his eyes when he followed the Queen of Bowie into the street.

She led him with a quick step to the guarded cabin near the center of the gold camp, and stopped in front of Big Burt, captain of the bronzed death-watch.

"Open the door!" she exclaimed. "I have come for the gold camp shadower!"

In an instant the hands of Big Burt loosened the ropes that kept the door shut, and the woman sprung fearlessly into the cabin.

"Where is the California ferret?" rung suddenly from her lips. "In Satan's name, Captain Burt, is this the way you keep your oath?"

The big sport drew back from the woman's look.

Father Ferret was gone!

CHAPTER VIII.

SHADOWS IN CAMP.

"GONE he is! the ferret from Frisco has skipped the ranch!"

These words dropped without effort from Big Burt's lips as he took in every quarter of the alcalde's cabin and saw that Father Ferret had actually escaped!

Diamond Dora looked on with blazing eyes.

She was baffled; the man she had sentenced to death had gone away, out from the shadow of death itself!

She saw that Big Burt had nothing to do with the escape. The captain of her guard was no traitor, and the words she had flung at him could have been left unsaid.

As the detective was not to be found the next thing to be done was to discover how he had eluded the vigilant guards.

The sharp eyes of the Bowie Notch pards soon made the discovery.

Overhead there was a slight opening in the roof, and a closer inspection revealed the avenue to freedom.

"Shasta Sam was behind the shanty on guard!" suddenly exclaimed one of the men. "It can't be that the Frisco ferret fooled him."

"Where is Shasta Sam?" asked the Queen of Bowie.

An examination of the little crowd failed to

show the man asked for, and somebody went outside.

All at once a cry of discovery was heard, and the crowd rushing out saw two men at one corner of the cabin; one flat on the ground.

"Here is Shasta Sam," said one of the couple pointing to the prostrate figure. "Father Ferret war too much for the old pard."

"Dead?" cried Dora stooping over the man with gleaming eyes.

"Dead, I guess."

Shasta Sam was picked up and carried into the cabin where it was found that he was alive but unconscious, and giving orders to have him attended to, the queen of the camp touched Dom Pablo's arm and went out.

"I didn't look for a play of this kind," she exclaimed, turning to her spy. "Father Ferret is as cunning as the animal whose name he bears. What will he do next?"

"He will come back."

Diamond Dora started.

"Ha! do you think so?" she cried.

"I know the man! An adventure like this never damps his ardor. He has sworn to find Sybil. He could have come to Bowie Notch nearly a month ago. Where has he put in the time? Not in Frisco for I have been on the watch. He left the city within six hours after his oath to Claude Stacey. I know this."

Dora smiled.

"It didn't take him all this time to make the journey between Frisco and Bowie."

"No; he was getting ready for work here. He knew you were in Bowie."

"Who told him?"

"Captain Bluff. He gave Father Ferret a full history of his married life."

"Overheard by you, Dom Pablo?"

"I didn't lose a word of the interview."

"Where were you?"

"In the room overhead with a hole for eye and ear!"

"You are a king!" cried Dora laughing.

"Yes, I heard every thing," the swarthy spy went on. "I saw and heard Father Ferret and Jordan together."

"Jordan? who is he?"

"The detective's friend, a young man who is as anxious to find Sybil as either Claude Stacey or the Frisco spotter is. He is handsome, cool, and without fear."

"Did he leave Frisco with Father Ferret?"

"He did."

"I am going to make Bowie Notch too hot for our foes!" exclaimed Diamond Dora after a moment's silence. "We have a mandate against strangers becoming citizens. I shall strengthen it."

"How?"

"No stranger shall be permitted to remain here ten minutes. I shall draw the line here, Dom Pablo. Bowie Notch is at my back, and the big game for the prize I hold is at hand. I have a mind to tell the girl all, and to show her that I am mistress here."

Dom Pablo's eyes dilated.

"Will you do that?" he asked showing his teeth.

"Why not? She is helpless in the net!" answered Dora.

"But you are not absolutely certain—"

The spy stopped suddenly.

"Not certain of what?" ejaculated the Queen of Bowie. "The girl has the serpent tattoo on her arm, and, then—then a mother ought to know her own!"

Dom Pablo the Dark seemed to draw back from the eyes of the woman who leaned forward and spoke the last words in his face.

"Listen! my blood is in the veins of that girl. So is the accursed blood of Claude Stacey. You know a good deal about medicine, Dom Pablo. I believe I took you from it when I made you my spy. Is there no way of taking his blood from her and leaving mine?"

Diamond Dora laughed over her question yet she seemed in terrible earnest.

"There's no way," replied Dom Pablo seriously.

"Then let her keep it!" was the reply, as the beautiful speaker drew back. "But if the game goes for him at any stage, she shall lose it all! Go down to Faro Fan's cabin; you know where it is. There is a dead woman where you saw a living one last. The wife of Father Ferret took her life because he came."

The spy started and uttered a low cry.

"It is not necessary for Bowie Notch to stare at the suicide," continued the camp queen. "I want you to bury her, Pablo."

"In the mountain?"

"Yes; it is more than Father Ferret would do. He once accused that woman of murdering his child; but she swore in her confession that she was guiltless. I believe her. But what are you staring at, man?"

"I can't believe that Faro Fan was ever Father Ferret's wife."

"She says so. The paper is in my possession. When you come back from the mountain I will let you see it."

Dom Pablo had a puzzled expression on his swarthy face when he walked toward the little cabin at the end of the camp.

His mission was to carry the corpse of the

suicide into the mountain, there to bury it alone in the dim starlight among the trees.

Dom Pablo had played spy, but never undertaker, and while he did not intend to disobey Diamond Dora, it was apparent that his present task was not to his liking.

He made no haste to reach the cabin, and when he found himself at the door beyond which lay the dead, he mechanically drew back.

"It's got to be done, pleasant or unpleasant," he suddenly exclaimed. "Satan's snuff-box! may this be the last time I ever play sexton!"

Dom Pablo crept noiselessly into the cabin, and found a lamp flickering on the rough little table near the outlines of a bed.

Faro Fan was still there, and the half-breed spy seemed to shudder as he held the ghostly lamp over the corpse.

"This woman Father Ferret's wife? *Cristo!* I don't believe it!" he cried. "She lied with her last breath. The Frisco spotter never thought enough of women to marry one."

Dom Pablo now began the unpleasant task before him.

He raised the rigid figure from the bed and carried it out with his teeth hard shut and his eyes holding a half-frightened look.

Nobody met him, and he increased his gait toward the mountains.

"I'm a sexton without pick or spade, but I don't need 'em," laughed Dom Pablo, to himself.

"There's a grave already made for this woman. Diamond Dora did not think of it."

After awhile the stars saw a man turn aside from a narrow mountain-path and enter a large opening in the side of one of the gigantic hills.

It was Dom Pablo the Dark, and his ghostly burden lay across his arm.

Darkness swallowed the man up beyond the mouth of the mine which he had entered.

For some distance he groped his way along a rough wall when he struck a match and continued his journey.

The tramp promised to become endless when Dom Pablo came to a halt.

A few matches bunched so as to form a torch showed him a small room whose walls bore marks of the pick.

"Nobody ever comes here," smiled the dark spy. "Gabriel even won't find Faro Fan. This is the Fatal Mine which has been abandoned. What a place for a grave! *Cristo!* it is almost too lonely here for a corpse."

The man deposited his burden on the ground, and drew back.

"I promised to bury Faro Fan, not to cover her up," he went on. "She is buried here as much as if she had six feet of dirt over her. This is a grave in the mountain. Now, I'll go back. No more such tasks in mine! Satan's snuff-box! but I shall feel that woman in my arms till I die!" and Dom Pablo laughed as he went away with Faro Fan left behind.

The man went back to Bowie Notch.

He was expected to report the accomplishment of his mission to the woman he served, and he bent his steps toward Dora's cabin.

But all at once he stopped and then drew back with his eyes fastened on an object that instant seen.

Not more than twenty feet away stood the stalwart figures of two men.

Dom Pablo, whose step had been almost noiseless, held his breath as he hugged the cabin against which he had shrunk at his startling discovery.

"Which is the cabin? Ah! we must find that out somehow!" spoke one of the twain.

"It is the best in the camp, of course."

But they are all alike to me."

"Not to me, Falcon. They have given her a better shanty than their own. Our detective who has forced us to play the game ourselves shall hear from me one of these days! By Jove! Bowie Notch is asleep. What a chance for us!"

"What a chance I'll make for Bowie Notch!" ejaculated Dom Pablo, under his breath. "I did not strike the camp an hour too soon," and he saw the two figures come forward and glide by almost within arm's reach.

"Now let me show Captain Bluff and Falcon that the game is ours!" cried Pablo, springing away.

A minute later he threw wide the door of a certain cabin and leaped in like a panther.

"They are here!" he exclaimed. "Dora! Dora! *Cristo!* Captain Bluff and his shadow!"

For once Dom Pablo, the Dark, was excited, but he almost instantly cooled down, and his eyes got a stare of disappointment.

It had taken him but a moment to discover that he was the only person in the cabin.

CHAPTER IX.

KNIFE OR LIFE.

THE man in the cabin was chagrined. He did not know what to do.

He had come thither to warn the Queen of Bowie Notch that two dangerous shadows had entered the camp; but she was not to be seen.

Where should he look for her?

It took several minutes for Dom Pablo the Dark to collect his thoughts.

During that time nobody came to interrupt him.

"Maybe she has gone to the girl," muttered the spy. "It is to her interest to guard her against Father Ferret, and the captain and his shadow. Ah! she must be with Sibyl!"

Pablo left the cabin and hurried down the street, but he had not got twenty yards when a hand clutched his shoulder and he was lifted clear off the ground.

"Satan's snuff-box!" cried the camp queen's spy. "*Cristo!* what kind of a lifting machine is this?"

"Not a word!" hissed a voice, and the spy looked into a pair of eyes that had a dangerous sparkle.

"Captain Bluff for a thousand!" he gasped.

"An' for a million on top of it!" was the response. "You are Pablo the Dark, the spy of the Queen of Bowie."

"So you say," Pablo replied with a grin.

"So I know!" and the speaker turned his head and gave a low whistle.

The next moment a man came up with a cat-like tread and Pablo gave him a look of recognition also.

"We've got to deal with this fellow first, Falcon," continued the man who had halted Pablo in the unceremonious manner described.

Falcon who was rather tall, splendidly built and the possessor of a dark skin nodded, and fixed his eyes on Pablo.

"Shall it be here, cap'n?" he asked.

"Not right here. Let us go beyond the limits of Bowie Notch. I have caught the rat without disturbing the rest. It is bonanza luck."

Pablo at that moment looked down and saw something glitter in Falcon's hand.

He knew it was the blade of a knife, and he thought he could see four fallow fingers encircling the hilt.

"Come along, Pablo," continued the man called Captain Bluff.

"You know us too well to open your mouth. Try it if you want to test your lungs, but Falcon will break the call, and break it forever!"

Pablo the Dark made no reply.

"I'm in for it until I can stock the cards on this pair," he murmured, as he was walked off between two cabins held by Captain Bluff, and watched like a hawk by Falcon who still held the knife ready for a quick stroke.

Bowie Notch, silent and apparently asleep, was left behind, and no halt was made until the little party got among the trees that fringed a narrow path leading into the mountains.

"Now, Pablo, you will find your tongue," suddenly said Captain Bluff as he turned upon the man whom he had conducted to the spot.

"In the first place, you beat us to camp?"

A faint smile of triumph appeared at the spy's mouth.

"You have told the Queen of Bowie that I was on the road?" the captain went on.

Don Pablo's eyes suddenly got a flash.

"Hadn't I a right to tell her?" he cried.

"Yes, the right that a paid shadower owns!" was the answer.

"What did she say?"

"Nothing!"

"Come! no lies, Pablo!" threatened the Californian. "You stand almighty close to the gates of Tartarus. A little closer, Falcon."

The athlete Mexican took a step nearer, and Pablo's quick eyes ever on the alert saw a slight movement of his dangerous right hand.

"You told Dora that I had left Frisco and yet she said nothing?" resumed Captain Bluff.

"Pablo, that is lying!"

The queen's shadower started, and for an instant forgot that he was a prisoner.

"We'll not press you for her answer," said the Californian.

"Do you know anything about Father Ferret?"

"He isn't here."

"No, I suppose not. You played spy a little too well in Frisco, you half-breed snake. I know now that while I talked with the gold-camp spotter you were in the room overhead. I did not discover this in time to warn Father Ferret before he left. Of course you have reported that conversation to your employer."

Pablo's countenance made reply.

"Father Ferret left Frisco nearly a month ago. Do you know that he did not come to Bowie Notch?"

The half-breed spy, with a look tinged with defiance, did not speak.

Captain Bluff sent a quick look toward Falcon, and that worthy gave Pablo a good view of the knife by lifting his hand.

"Do you mean to kill me if I don't turn traitor?" asked Pablo.

"Yes."

"Then," muttered the half-breed, "I don't intend to die just yet."

"Now, take your choice, Pablo, between knife and life. You have heard of Father Ferret since leaving Frisco?"

"I have."

"In Bowie Notch?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"To-night."

"Great Caesar!" cried Captain Bluff, "are we at the old fellow's heels? What did he do here?"

"He got away."

"From where?"

"From his guards."

An exclamation of surprise fell from the Californian's lips.

"He was corraled, then? Did Diamond Dora know him?"

"She did."

"Through you, of course, Pablo?" hissed Captain Bluff through his teeth. "If the gold-camp ferret got away he will turn up all right yet. Was he alone?"

"Yes."

"Pablo, do you know Jordan?"

"The young man who was with Father Ferret in Frisco?" said the half-breed.

"Ah! I see you know him," cried Captain Bluff. "He did not come to Bowie with Father Ferret?"

"He was not seen with him."

"One more question, Pablo: Which cabin is the queen's palace?"

At this interrogative Pablo the Dark shut his lips firmly in front of the knife that menaced him.

He had to draw the line of silence somewhere, and the place had been reached.

"You won't answer that?" exclaimed Captain Bluff.

"I wouldn't be oath-bound Pablo if I did."

"All right! We won't press you too hard," and the Californian stepped back. "We will find the cabin if we want it. Now, Falcon, I turn the case over to you."

All at once the left hand of the Mexican shadow darted like a bird at Pablo and closed on his breast.

"Hounded in Frisco but found at Bowie Notch!" came from Falcon's tongue, as Captain Bluff looked on with folded arms and with a gleam in his deep, dark eyes.

"Pablo, it is my duty to spit your heart!"

Pablo the Dark recoiled without an effort, and found himself followed by Falcon, above whose glittering eyes was held the slender Bowie.

"They will find Queen Dora's cabin whether I tell them or not," passed through the half-breed's mind. "I don't want the knife of this Greaser in my flesh. *Cristo!* no!"

Then the eyes of the two men met, and Pablo spoke:

"I'll tell you where the cabin is."

"We'll find it, Pablo, my boy," laughed Falcon. "Are you ready to become the first prey of our hunt?"

"If you want to knife Moralie's son—yes!"

The effect of these words on Falcon was startling.

His hand almost dropped from his human prey as he started back, with his eyes fixed on Pablo and dilated with wonder.

"What is this?" demanded Captain Bluff, springing forward. "What did this watchful serpent say?"

Falcon said nothing, but faced Pablo with the aspect of a man who had been frightened out of the use of his tongue.

"Jupiter! Has a word struck you dumb?" continued the Californian. "What did you say, Pablo?"

The dark spy of Queen Dora showed his teeth in a grin as he gave Captain Bluff look for look.

"I give you a second!" cried the Californian, and there clicked in his hand a huge revolver.

"If Falcon is speechless, you are not, Pablo. Out with the truth! With what did you hit this man?"

"I've got my tongue, cap'n," exclaimed Falcon. "You will lower the revolver you hold in that man's face."

"I do! Ah! you want to go on with the execution. By Jove! Falcon, I thought Pablo the Dark had performed a miracle."

The next moment the Mexican's hand dropped from Pablo's breast, but at the same time Falcon sprung toward him and almost thrust his face into the spy's.

"Is what you said true?" he cried. "Answer me on the soul of the Virgin, Pablo."

"On the Virgin's soul, I answer," was the solemn response. "You didn't want to kill Moralie's son, eh, Falcon?"

Falcon the Mexican straightened with a cry and stepped back.

"Kill Moralie's son? no!" he ejaculated. "I'd wade through blood to hades first. *Cristo!* I don't kill Pablo to-night, nor at any other time!"

Captain Bluff looked like a man bewildered by some terrible revelation.

Falcon and Pablo stood apart, the latter free to spring away like a deer.

"I can't let him go," suddenly cried the Californian. "He is the spy of the Queen of Bowie Notch. He tracked us in Frisco, he warned the mountain witch that we were on the trail; he betrayed Father Ferret to her and her pards. He must pay with his life for all this. Moralie's son, is he? Was that the last card he had to play on you, Falcon? It's made a girl out of

you at any rate, but his biggest card wins not with Claude Stacey!"

Up went the revolver again, as the last sentence rung from the Californian's lips, but the next moment there was a hand at his wrist.

"Me first!" exclaimed the man who looked into his face. "That man is Morale's child. That is enough! Ask me no questions. Come! let us go back and hunt the game we came here for!"

Captain Bluff looked into Falcon's face for a moment and then lowered the weapon.

"What infernal mystery is this?" he cried. "An hour ago you wanted to kill Pablo on sight."

"But then I did not know!"

"In Satan's name, who is Morale?"

"No questions, cap'n," and Falcon showed his teeth in a singular smile. "If you want to walk over me to Pablo the Dark, you can do so."

"I can't afford to do that!"

"Then back to the game that may lurk in Bowie Notch."

A moment later the spy of the Gold-Camp Queen stood alone and unhurt where he expected to lose his life.

The figures of the two men had already vanished.

"Cristo! I played a card I thought I would never have to play!" exclaimed Pablo. "May I be forgiven where Morale is! There is another thing to be done to-night. Dora must be warned, and if the worst comes, the terrible oath taken years ago must be kept."

A man sprung from the spot occupied by Pablo the Dark and bounded up the trail.

As he disappeared the clear and ringing report of a revolver awoke the echoes of the night.

"Gods! look yonder!" cried Captain Bluff to Falcon as the two reached the cabins of Bowie Notch.

The revolver heard by the flying spy had flashed its fire in their faces, and a man staggering away had fallen heavily not five feet from where they had halted.

"Shot on sight! Them war ther orders!" cried a coarse voice. "I'll go and s'prise the boys in *La Paradiso*!"

The shooter turned and walked off, and Captain Bluff and Falcon sprung to the fallen man.

"*Santa Cristo!*" cried the Mexican. "*It is Father Ferret!*"

CHAPTER X.

HALF BETRAYED.

THE escape of Father Ferret the Frisco detective from Big Burt and his fellow guards was effected in time to cheat Diamond Dora the incensed and beautiful Queen of Bowie Notch.

The woman had come back to the cabin with her spy Pablo the Dark for the purpose of hurrying the spotter to speedy execution, but she had found the prison empty and the captive gone.

It was then that the men of Bowie Notch believed that their mistress had not misjudged the man who had found an avenue to freedom by way of the cabin roof.

He was certainly Father Ferret the detective and firm in this belief, they offered their services to Dora and swore to follow his trail to the end.

"No trailing," the Queen of Bowie had said in reply to this oath. "The man will come back, but not as Father Ferret nor as Silas Sorrel. He will come in some other guise. My order is this: All strangers seen in Bowie Notch from this moment are to be shot on sight!"

Having delivered this command which she knew would be obeyed to the letter, she commissioned Pablo to give the body of Faro Fan burial, a commission which we have seen executed in a manner.

Diamond Dora was in her cabin when the sharp pistol-shot heard in the last chapter rung out on the night air.

"Already?" she exclaimed springing to the door. "Has the Frisco spotter found his doom so soon?" And standing in the door she listened with an eager smile at her lips.

Not far away a man was walking toward *La Paradiso* with a smoking revolver in his hand.

He was one of the Pard of Bowie Notch.

"I've obeyed ther queen's commands to ther letter!" he cried. "All strangers ar' ter be dropped on sight, an' I've just tumbled one in fine style. I'll make Jocko Bill set out ther wet goods when I hit *La Paradiso*, and ther boys'll nearly die with envy. I don't know who I've dropped, but no difference. He comes under Queen Dora's orders, an' thet's enough!"

The Queen of Bowie Notch did not see this man. If she had she would have stopped him before he reached the one saloon of the camp where Big Burt and pards were discussing the last startling events of camp-life.

"What meant that shot?" suddenly asked a voice at which the man with the pistol halted, and looked at the speaker.

"Ho! is it you, girl?" he exclaimed, smiling when he saw that his interrogator was Sybil.

"It is no one else, Denver Dall."

"What did it mean?" laughed the gold sport.

"My dropper went off a minute ago. It war nothing, girl."

"You deceived me," exclaimed Sybil. "Your eyes betray the importance of your shot. I know you are not given to accidents, Denver Dall. Why, the weapon is still in your hand!"

"Hang me if it isn't!"

"You fired at a human target. Tell me!" And Sybil's hand fell upon the rough sleeve of the sport, and her white fingers gently closed there.

Denver Dall found that he was fairly caught.

"What's ther shootin' ov that prowlin' stranger ter this young girl?" he asked himself as he looked down into her eyes. "She's been a kind o' camp mystery ter me an' ther boys ever since she came hyer; but Queen Dora never gave us any chance ter get at her. Now she wants ter know why I shot awhile ago. Shall I tell her?"

"You don't want to tell me," continued Sybil as the man did not speak. "If you do not I will take your back trail and find out for myself."

"You will?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've just been carryin' out ther queen's orders."

"And they were—what?"

Denver Dall hesitated.

"Ter shoot every stranger on sight—thar!" he blurted suddenly.

The girl drew back with a light cry.

"And you have shot somebody?" she cried.

"I've carried out Queen Dora's orders—nothin' more."

"Where is he?"

"See hyer, girl," and the man took Sybil's arm. "You don't want to go to my human target."

"Why not?"

"In the first place, because he's no sight for a girl ter look at an' secondly, he's nothin' ter you, anyhow."

"Do you think, Denver Doll, that I have never looked at the dead?" exclaimed Sybil, with a light laugh. "The sight of the man shot on sight by you will not blanch my cheek. He may be nothing to me, but I must see him. I will!"

"That's pretty positive, girl."

"I mean it. Where is this man?"

"I'd rather not!" and the sport of Bowie shook his head.

"Don't you know whom you've killed?"

"Not exactly."

"What is your guess?"

"He looked like the man who slipped through our fingers awhile ago."

"What man?"

"Queen Dora called him Father Ferret, the Frisco detective."

Sybil seemed to gasp for breath.

"A detective from Frisco in Bowie Notch?" she cried. "What does he want here?"

"I don't know."

"Diamond Dora fights him does she?"

"Yes."

"And it was because he escaped as you say that she gave out orders to shoot all strangers on sight?"

"You don't get to pump me clean dry, girl," laughed Denver Dall.

"One more question."

"Well?"

"Did the detective accuse Queen Dora of anything?"

"I kin answer that. He never admitted that he was Father Ferret."

Sybil was silent with a strange and eager look in her eyes.

"Come and go back with me, Denver Dall," she said, pleadingly, to the sport.

"Back to the man I've shot?"

"Yes."

"In Jehu's name, what for?" exclaimed the surprised sport. "You don't think you know him, eh?"

"I don't know," answered Sybil, doubtfully.

"I'll go back on one condition."

"What is that?"

"It is that you tell me all you know about yourself. Hang it all, girl, you've been a puzzle ter Bowie Notch ever since you came hyer."

The girl smiled.

"Whom do you think I am?" she asked

"Somebody of importance."

"Why?"

"Because you're always under the eye of our queen."

"Who is she?" suddenly cried Sybil, clutching the sport's arm.

"Don't you know?"

"Would I ask you if I did?" was the quick response.

"Mebbe not," said Denver Dall, slowly.

"Queen Dora is a woman about whom I don't know very much. I've been with her longer than any one man exceptin' that dark fellow called Pablo who got in ter-night. I knew her in Frisco."

"When?"

"It was years ago."

A sudden light came into Sybil's eyes.

"Come to my home. We'll let the dead man go for the present," she cried.

Denver Dall drew back.

"No; I don't want to play against the queen. I can't afford ter. I'll go with you ter my victim, girl, but not ter yer cabin."

Sybil showed her disappointment in her looks.

"God pardon me if I play against Diamond Dora," she went on. "I am of age now and I have a right to know something."

"Something about what?"

"That woman's past and my own."

"I can't tell any more."

"You mean you won't."

Denver Dall's look was answer enough.

"One of these days I will tell you more than you know," exclaimed Sybil. "There is some terrible crime covered up—some gigantic sin which shall be uncovered. This detective did not come to Bowie Notch for nothing, and Queen Dora's play for his life was not in sport. You won't go deeper into her history for me, Denver Dall; I shall never repeat the request. From this moment I shall play a hand for myself."

The man showed his teeth in a light laugh.

"You don't want to rouse the tigress back yonder!" he ejaculated. "Her blood is already hot ag'in' one person; you don't want ter turn it inter a channel thet flows toward you! I give you this as a pointer, girl!"

"You mean Diamond Dora?" cried Sybil, with flashing eyes, as she drew off a step and straightened like a young queen.

"Thet's who I mean."

"If I rouse her, I'll never crouch and beg for mercy!" she continued. "I had her eyes flashing and her face white once to-night, but Dom Pablo came between. I could have killed the sallow spy for his interference!"

"The man who likes you, eh? Ha, ha!"

"What is that?" and Sybil came toward Denver Dall with a bound. "Do you call that serpent my lover?"

"He looks at himself in that light anyhow. The hull camp knows that, girl. Whar hev yer eyes been this year past?"

Sybil looked astonished into the twinkling eyes, of the gold-camp sport.

"You play with me!" she suddenly cried.

"This half-breed spy of Queen Dora's certainly never thinks of making me his—"

She stopped as if she could not force herself to utter the only word that would fitly close the sentence.

"His wife, eh?" finished Denver Dall. "Bless your sweet wings, my angel, he thinks of nothing else. I could tell you if I wanted ter, thet he thinks he has cl'ar sailin', an' that he also—No! I'll stop whar I am! Now, do you want ter see ther dead man?"

The sport's singular conclusion left Sybil deeply disappointed.

Her eyes had not ceased to show the surprise with which she had received the revelation about Pablo's intentions.

"What! this cunning, oily, spying half-breed, with long and dangerous looking hands and midnight eyes full of evil, her lover?"

She had never looked at him in this light before, and now she was thunderstruck.

But all at once there came back to her a thousand glances from Pablo's eyes which she had never interpreted before. In the light of Denver Doll's revelation, they were plain now.

"No!" she suddenly said in a voice that startled the sport. "We will not go to the dead man, Denver Doll, I thank you for what you have told me, and I won't press you for any thing more. You were going to *La Paradiso*. I won't detain you another moment. Good-by."

Sybil held out her hand as she finished, and the man took it with a look of wonder.

"That's right! Go back to the shanty an' let ther game play itself out," he spoke. "I've told too much for my own good if Queen Dora should find me out."

"I will never betray you, Denver Dall. Remember this. The game cannot be played out without me, and I will be there."

The hands dropped apart and the sport of Bowie Notch saw the girl walk away, but he did not see the person who had witnessed the interview from the stygian shadows of the nearest cabin.

CHAPTER XI.

UNEXPECTEDLY CAUGHT.

FATHER FERRET on the ground before Captain Bluff and Falcon was a genuine surprise.

They had seen him drop like one dead before the weapon of Denver Dall, and when that worthy walked away to acquaint the frequenters of *La Paradiso* with his wonderful shot, they went forward and bent over the fallen shadower.

"*Santa Cristo!* it is Father Ferret!" was Falcon's exclamation.

Captain Bluff, or Claude Stacey, could not believe this nor did he until he saw the rough's victim move and heard him speak:

"I'm nobody else, gentlemen, since I know you both!" he exclaimed. "I'm not the dead man that fellow imagines, and I'll prove it by getting up. Here I am, Captain Bluff!"

The Californian could not suppress an ejaculation of wonder when he beheld the speaker standing erect before him.

"Jupiter! I'm glad you're still on top!" cried

the captain. "The man who fired is one of those who miss in the dark."

"I'm not missed!" laughed Father Ferret. "There's a furrow over my ear, and I can feel blood trickling down my back. But this is no place for us. I want to see you, captain."

The detective spoke in a tone that lent much importance to his words, and the three walked away. Captain Bluff eyeing Father Ferret with a great deal of curiosity.

"What brought you here?" suddenly asked the Frisco shadower as he turned upon the Californian a few rods from the scene of Denver Doll's almost fatal shot.

Captain Bluff threw Falcon a quick glance before he answered.

"I wasn't getting any news from you," he said at last.

A smile stole over the old detective's face.

"In other words, you couldn't wait, eh, captain?" he laughed. "You are so anxious to make Sybil, your lost daughter, a double millionairess, that you had to take the trail yourself with Falcon here?"

"That's about the size of it."

"I thought I was to have the whole hunt to myself! Wasn't that the bargain in Frisco?"

"Yes—"

"But you haven't lived up to it. Back yonder is Bowie Notch ruled over by the woman who was once your wife and who is Sybil's mother. I require one thing at your hands and without it I leave this trail forever and now."

"What is that?"

"Your instant withdrawal from the game!"

Captain Bluff was seen to start at this plainly spoken requirement.

He bit his lips under his heavy mustache.

"When will you report?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"Can't you approach the time?"

"No."

"You left Frisco nearly a month ago. Where have you put in the time?"

"On the trail."

"Between there and here?"

"On the trail, I tell you, Captain Bluff! I am not in the witness-box. If you want to cross hands with Diamond Dora go and do it; but don't rely on Father Ferret."

"You are very particular."

"I want no help on this trail. You can either go away, or take it up yourself. Make choice, and do it soon, too."

Captain Bluff seemed to be measuring the detective through long black lashes, and there was a malicious twinkle in Falcon's eyes.

"Have you yet any clew to Sybil?" suddenly questioned the Californian.

"I have no report to make."

The answer was not pleasing to Captain Bluff. A month gone and no clew to Sybil!

What had this famous detective been doing?

Before the Californian could reply, Father Ferret's hand stole up and closed on his arm, and the next moment Falcon was alone.

"Claude Stacy," resumed the Frisco spotter in a lowered voice, and with his eyes fastened on Captain Bluff, "I have been on the trail ever since I left Frisco. There are two trails. Do you know it?"

"No."

"I followed one until it led into the other."

"What is the other trail?"

"Ah! not now, captain, nor here!" laughed the detective. "You're always after a secret; but you must let me keep this one till I am ready to report."

"You won't give me a hint, eh?"

"Not a word more than this: It is possible that you will never get to set Sybil up in the grand style you've mapped out."

"By heavens! I will!" cried Stacey. "I will make her a gold queen—richer than any woman in the country! That is," he added, toning down, "if the girl isn't dead!"

To this the detective made no answer, but raised his arm and pointed toward the grouped shanties of Bowie Notch.

"Are you going to play against Diamond Dora yonder, or will you take your shadow back?" he asked, looking into the captain's face.

"I'll have to go back. I guess," was the reply.

"To Frisco?"

"Yes."

"Then go at once. Oh, by the way, captain, how is the madman in the hospital?"

Claude Stacey started as if he had heard the announcement of a death sentence.

"I mean the man who contracted a sore throat at the Eldorado," the detective went on, smiling.

"Is there any hope for him?"

Captain Bluff found himself caught in the web of piercing eyes, and knew that denial would not work with Father Ferret.

"I don't look after him," he said with a laugh.

"The man was dogging me. I had to do something, and I gave him the grip at the Eldorado. They say that his chances are slim."

It seemed to give Claude Stacey pleasure to utter the last words.

His eyes kindled under their influence, and got a real triumphant look.

"I didn't know you had such power in your

hands," smiled Father Ferret, and his eyes dropped mechanically to the captain's hands. "Is that the first man you ever choked into insanity?"

"The first one!"

"Very well, captain. He may be the last. If he never leaves the hospital sane, you may be safe."

"He'll never leave in that way!" said Claude through his teeth.

"You want to see that he does not for your own safety. You know why!"

The emphasis of the last sentence brought Captain Bluff forward, and the next moment his face was almost touching the detective's.

"You know something!" he cried.

The gleaming blue eyes before him gave out the only reply he got, and under it Captain Bluff shut his hands and glued his lips together.

"I wish I'd known this sooner!" he said to himself. "Jehoshaphat! what kind of a man have I in my employ? Does he know the secret I keep from Falcon even? If he does, why should I let him go on with this hunt? I recollect now that he fell into my hands easily in Frisco. I had no trouble in inducing him to go on the hunt of Sybil; he fell into the scheme at once. Now, he makes me believe that he knows the identity of the man I throttled in the Eldorado the night he entered into our bargain. Great God! if he does, I lose this gold game in the end!"

Captain Bluff looked toward the spot where he had left his shadow, Falcon, but the darkness prevented him from seeing that person.

"If you know the man I choked I wish you would give me his name," suddenly cried the captain. "I never stopped to ask his name. It was enough to know that he was interfering with my business. I had to kill or fix the snake before I could go on. Who is he, Father Ferret?"

The interrogative was direct.

"Your shadow, captain! Why, you have just confessed this."

"Confound it! I know all this," cried Claude Stacey. "You won't tell me any more? By heavens! you don't know anything! It is a bluff game you are playing, Father Ferret. Let's give it up. I'll leave the trail to you. Falcon and I will go back and wait for your report. If you are here to watch Diamond Dora with the hope that she knows anything about Sybil, you won't get anything for your pains. I've tried that game and failed. I played it long before I engaged you. The woman doesn't know what has become of her child, and mine. If you tell me that your trail for Sybil leads to Diamond Dora I will tell you that you have been fooled."

"I thought the trail was to be mine?" smiled the Frisco spotter.

"So it is. Take it and play any hand you see fit! I'm going back to Falcon."

Captain Bluff turned toward his shadow and walked away.

The detective did not stir.

"Good-by, captain," he sent after the Californian.

"Good-by!" snapped Captain Bluff in return, and in no very good humor.

He appeared suddenly to Falcon who, not expecting him at that particular time, started at the sound of his footstep.

"We're going back to Frisco, Falcon!" cried the captain, halting before his shadow.

"What for?"

"For two things; first, because Father Ferret will have the whole trail to himself or throw up the game—"

"Well?"

"The second reason will be told when we get there!"

"I don't like it!" growled Falcon. "I don't think this blue-eyed spotter is all you consider him. He drives you back with a threat. He's had a month in which to find out something about Sybil, but what has he found? Nothing! I wouldn't go back."

"What would you do, Falcon?"

"Stay here and play the best hand I could."

"Why here?"

"Your tigress-wife is in Bowie Notch!"

"I know that."

"The child is hers. She ought to know something about Sybil. You say you believe she does not. Let us stay here and find out. You can send me back to Bowie if you want to, and can put on a disguise which the keenest eyes cannot penetrate."

"You might meet Moralie's son again."

"Great God! that is true!" ejaculated Falcon.

"Come! I am willing to go back to Frisco."

"But you cannot return, gentlemen!" said a deep voice. "You will stand where you are, nor lift a hand above your hips!"

Captain Bluff and Falcon wheeled at the same moment and threw their hands to their revolvers despite the sternly spoken injunction.

"Who are you?" demanded the Californian.

"We are the loyal subjects of the Queen of Bowie Notch. I am Big Burt, captain of the royal guard, and there are six revolvers grinning into your faces, gents."

By this time the two Californians had seen the figures of six stalwart men in dark shirts, and a closer look revealed the deadly six-shooter in the right hand of each.

"Our orders are to shoot you on sight," con-

tinued Big Burt; "but I'll take the responsibility of presentin' you to the queen. Forward, gents! Hands down, and shut!"

"Jerusalem!" muttered Claude Stacey. "I am to meet the woman I'd give worlds not to see just now!"

CHAPTER XII.

A BOLD HAND.

CAPTAIN BLUFF dared not trust himself to look into the eyes of the man who had been surprised with him by the six men of Bowie Notch.

Falcon stood ready to take chances with the pards at a signal or a look from his companion, and Claude Stacey knew that the odds were terribly against them.

There was now no alternative, and a forced tramp to the presence of Queen Dora was the next danger to be met.

Father Ferret kept his distance even if he knew of the unlucky accident, and Captain Bluff gave up all thoughts of rescue by the old detective.

"Forward, gents!" cried Big Burt once more, and the march began.

Shoulder to shoulder, guarded by the cocked revolvers of the bronzed pards, the Californian and his Mexican shadow marched back toward the camp.

"If she recognizes me, the game will be played out almighty soon unless a cold hand interferes," murmured Stacey. "I did not look for anything of this kind, but I've got to take it. This doesn't look like finding the girl Sybil. By Jupiter! it looks as black as midnight for me and my big gold game."

Tramp, tramp down the street of Bowie Notch went the big guards and their prisoners.

"Halt!" suddenly rung out from the captain's throat. "Hyer's ther queen's palace. We'll have her majesty hyer in a second if she's at home."

At that moment the door of the nearest cabin was jerked open and a woman sprung forward with a "Here I am!" that made Claude Stacey start.

"Get a light!" said Big Burt, as he looked with a triumphant grin into the woman's face. "We've got somebody hyer worth lookin' at, Dora."

The Queen of Bowie Notch went back into the cabin, but soon reappeared with a lamp in her right hand.

"That's the creature!" murmured Captain Bluff. "She's lovely yet, and a tigress still for a yellow thousand!"

Diamond Dora approached with the light and leaned forward with curiosity as she held it before the faces of the prisoners.

In an instant her eyes had encountered those of Captain Bluff, and the pair were looking at one another.

Those who watched the woman closely saw a change come over her, and when her gaze had wandered from Captain Bluff to Falcon and rested on his face, her eyes suddenly got a flashing light.

"At last Claude Stacey!" she exclaimed, turning back to Captain Bluff. "I have been waiting with patience for you. I knew you would come. I did not have to set any traps. I was not compelled to lure you to Bowie Notch. You were certain to come some day and so I waited. Here at last! where you are prisoner and I am queen!"

Her figure straightened proudly at the end of her last sentence, and for a little while she waited for a reply.

"I am here, taken unawares by a lot of sneaking panthers. I don't ask for mercy. I don't expect any."

"That is good!" laughed Dora. "When you expect nothing you shall not be disappointed."

"Guard the other man there, Captain Burt. I want to see this one alone."

Claude Stacey's eyes were observed to glitter.

He was going to be alone with the Queen of Bowie, and a thrill passed to his heart when he thought that the tables might be turned.

Diamond Dora led the way into the cabin, and shut the door behind her. Then she placed the lamp back on the little table in the middle of the room, and looked slowly into Captain Bluff's face.

"Are you hunting me?" she suddenly asked. "If I am the object of your trail, that trail has ended."

A smile came to the lips of the Californian.

"Why would I hunt you?" he asked. "Isn't there another?"

The woman seemed to recoil a step.

"There was another," she exclaimed; "there was an angel called Sybil—a child in whose veins our blood once flowed. She is your quest. Ah! you hunt the child, not the mother."

Captain Bluff did not speak.

"Did it take you all this time to discover me?" Diamond Dora went on. "If you had come months ago I could have finished your trail so far as Sybil is concerned. The child is dead!"

Though prepared for anything, Claude Stacey could not greet this revelation with firmness.

"Dead?" he echoed, leaning suddenly toward the woman.

"Your daughter is dead," was the answer. "Since we separated I have been playing spy. I wanted to find the child who disappeared one night in Frisco. I desired to fold my own to my bosom and to keep her there, even though your blood helped to give her life. I put on the trail hunters as keen as Father Ferret, and with them I discovered that the girl was dead."

"Now, with Sybil dead, Claude Stacey, I turn on you. This is my kingdom; you are in my power. I forget that I was once your wife; I remember only the life I lived after I became such. You know that when we parted I swore to pay you some day for the theft of Sybil from my arms. I have had a spy at your heels for years, almost from the day you came back from the war. I knew before you set foot in Frisco that you were not killed at Ball's Bluff, as report said. You lived as Major Montooth in several places before you played that character in California. You see I own a spy who lets nothing escape him."

"Pablo the Dark!" ejaculated Captain Bluff.

"Dom Pablo," answered Dora, smiling. "A keener human ferret than he never lived. He eclipses the one you bargained with in Frisco. Your shadower has been here; I knew him the moment I saw him, thanks to Pablo's keener eyes. He escaped by the skin of his teeth, but there is yet to be sprung a death-trap on Father Ferret. Ha! did you think him a match for Pablo?"

"I thought of nothing of the kind."

"Not Sybil was in your mind, Claude Stacey. What did you intend to do with the girl?"

"I was going to make our child the richest woman in the country."

"Not with the lost mine property!" laughed Dora. "That little piece of paper which you would never show me, turned up in duplicate after our parting. It was solved by this wonderful Pablo of mine, and I need not tell you that Bowie Notch stands over the big bonanzas that have been lost for years."

Captain Bluff smiled as if he knew that the woman was deliberately lying.

"It is all bosh, Claude Stacey!" continued the queen. "You talked of millions to Father Ferret when you were actually penniless. I am the only person who is able to enrich our child, but I have told you she is dead."

"Then the game is played out," said the Californian.

"Not yet!" exclaimed the woman. "There is yet another play, and it comes from my hands. Fortune brought you here, but fate will take you away."

"Very well," replied Captain Bluff, through his teeth.

"There is yet another chance for you and your pard," the woman went on "but it is only one."

He gave her a look, but no reply.

"Don't you understand me?" asked Dora.

"No."

"Then let me show you," and a stride carried the Queen of Bowie Notch to the door. "I said I had set no trap for you, Captain Bluff, as the camps of California used to call you, but I have a trap which is always ready for the enemies of the Queen of Bowie. Captain Burt, come here."

The door was opened as she issued the command, and the leader of the gold-camp guard showed his dark face and magnificent figure at the threshold.

"This man wants to see the wonders of Satan's Caldron," continued Dora, covering Captain Bluff with her hand. "I have no doubt that his shadow, Falcon, has the same desire. You will conduct them to the spot!"

"Come, captain," said Big Burt, looking at the man, whose teeth were shut and in whose eyes shone a gleam of suddenly-assumed defiance.

"We obey all the commands of Queen Dora without a question, and this one can't be overlooked."

"To the Caldron with him!" cried the woman. "The name tells you, Claude Stacey, that it is associated with Diamond Dora's revenge! So it is. Satan's Caldron is in the heart of those wonderful bonanzas called the Lost Mines. You shall have the honor of being the first man to explore it! Take him away, Captain Burt. The girl-hunter and gold-seeker from Frisco known by a dozen names ends his game in Bowie Notch!"

The next instant Captain Bluff was looking into a leveled revolver behind which shone the black eyes of Queen Dora's right bower.

"There will never be another hand played!" the woman went on, turning away with a final look. "You will talk to stone if you attempt to prolong this scene, Claude Stacey. The ties that once bound us together can't be recovered now. I am your wife no more, thank Heaven! I am Dora the Queen of Bowie Notch—Dora the mountain lioness of California. Go to Satan's Caldron! take with you for company the Mexican shadow whose existence shall end with yours. For the last time, Captain Burt. Away with the Frisco fool!"

Diamond Dora walked toward the darkest corner of the cabin and began to rearrange

some objects on a little stand with exasperating coolness.

Claude Stacey stepped back from the big sport who was in the act of taking hold of him.

"I'll play the card I have kept back. If it fails then I am doomed!" he muttered, and the next moment he had covered one half of the distance between himself and the Gold-Camp Queen.

"I am not Claude Stacey!" he suddenly cried.

"You've been throwing the hatred of years into the face of the wrong man! You were never my wife. I never had a daughter Sybil. Ha! Diamond Dora, look close for yourself and be deceived. There's no tattoo on my breast like there is, or was, on the real Claude Stacey's!"

Before he was through Diamond Dora had turned and her eyes were riveted upon him.

"You are playing the last card, I see," she cried, recovering from the surprise forced by his first startling words. "Not Claude Stacey, eh? Ha! that game won't win! You play the false hand too late!"

"But I swear it—by all that's holy!" was the response.

"You dare not doom me as your husband, for we were never mated. The tattoo is on my bosom if I am Claude Stacey. Look for yourself, Dora of Bowie Notch. My flesh is before you!" And the prisoner leaned forward with his hands holding open his dark shirt-front so that the Queen of the Camp could see his flesh.

Impelled by some impulse, Big Burt snatched up the lamp and held it before the doomed man.

Diamond Dora leaned toward him with glittering eyes.

He had spoken the truth; his flesh was unmarked.

"It is the work of magic!" cried the woman. "Away with him!"

CHAPTER XIII.

PABLO'S NEW TRAIL.

DESPITE his oath that he was not the true Claude Stacey, Captain Bluff was forced from Diamond Dora's presence by Big Burt and his pards.

The Queen of the Gold Camp watched him depart with no show of mercy in her look, and when he was gone she broke into a laugh, in which derision was mingled with triumph.

"The last card took no trick!" she cried.

"Claude Stacey's lie and his willingness to swear away his name failed where he thought they would succeed. I am rid of that villain at last. The escaped detective, Father Ferret, is the only man before me. I can now go back to Sybil. I can now take up the startling question she put at me when Pablo came in from Frisco. I will pay my respects to her before I proceed another step. She must not know the meaning of Claude Stacey's visit to Bowie Notch."

Diamond Dora left the cabin and went straight to the one which for years had been Sybil's home.

No reply was made to the light raps she bestowed on the door.

"Where is the girl?" ejaculated the Queen of Bowie, and a moment later she had opened the door and was in the cabin.

The interior was dark, but the eager woman found her way to a low cot at one side of the room, and her hands soon told her that it had no occupant.

"Heavens! the girl is gone!" she cried.

A match in the woman's hand dissipated the darkness, and the first object she saw was a piece of paper on the little stand in the middle of the room.

A bound and her hand received it, and holding the match down with blazing eyes she read:

"You would not tell me, Diamond Dora, so I have gone to find out!"

AIDA."

The mistress of the mountain diggings uttered a wild cry when she reached the bottom of the note.

Aida, called Sybil, but known as Aida to the Bowie Notch Pards, with one or two exceptions, had left the camp!

The prize so well guarded was gone; the jewel hunted by Captain Bluff and Father Ferret had slipped through the grasp of all!

No wonder Diamond Dora stood thunder-struck.

If she could have heard the tones in which Sybil said "good-by" to Denver Dall the sport a short time before she would not have escaped so easily; but Dora knew nothing of the interview in which she had been half-betrayed.

Sybil was gone! That was enough for her to know.

"She shall be hunted to the end of the world!" she exclaimed. "Thank fortune, I have a trailer at my command who can see in the dark. I have not lost Sybil while Don Pablo is at my command. Where is my dark-skinned sleuth-bound?"

An unexpected reply to the question was at hand, for all at once a human figure landed in the cabin at the woman's side and she looked into the eager gleaming eyes of Pablo the Dark.

"Ask for Satan and he comes!" laughed Dora. "Pablo, the nest is empty and the bird is gone!"

The half-breed spy threw a quick mad look around the room.

"She came here awhile ago," he cried.

"Ah! you saw her?"

"I did!" and the spy's eyes snapped.

"Was she alone?"

"Alone! I overheard her and one of your people, Queen Dora."

"Who was he?" exclaimed the woman.

"Denver Dall."

"What did they talk about?"

"The girl wanted to know," answered Pablo as he leaned toward Diamond Dora. "She got Denver to tell her a good deal!"

"The traitor! where will I find him, Pablo?"

Pablo the Dark was seen to set his teeth hard.

"I'll tell you where by and by," was his answer through them. "How do you know she is gone?"

"By this!" and the note found on the table was placed in the half-breed's hand.

The dark fellow's eyes took it in at a glance.

"Santa Cristo! she has gone!" he cried, looking up. "Shall I take the trail?"

"At once—at once!" was the quick response.

"Pablo, if she leads you round the world, she must be caught! You know how to find trails in the dark; you know the secret hiding-places of Frisco and of the mountains. You know whither she would be likely to go to hunt for a solution of her life mystery. She has recollections of Los Angeles; she remembers Frisco. In Heaven's name, Pablo, do your best work now!"

The half-breed spy looked searchingly into Queen Dora's face while she talked.

"You will give Pablo the oath now," he said.

"What oath?"

"The one about the girl—about your daughter."

The Queen of Bowie Notch recoiled with a cry that seemed to drive every vestige of color from her face.

"Do you exact the oath before you will go?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Pablo, look at her skin; it is white. Yours is dark; you are half-Indian. I don't insult you when I say this, for I have heard you say that you are proud of your Indian blood. Let me pay you wealth enough to buy you a white wife in Frisco."

"No!" cried Pablo, pushing off the hand that rested on his sleeve. "I have not served Queen Dora for gold. I hate money. She knows this. I want the oath I asked for when I became your trail-dog. I won't stir on this trail without it!"

The half-breed's resolution seemed to draw a groan from the tortured heart of the beautiful woman before him.

"I am willing to give you the Fatal Mine."

"No."

"I will add the Bonanza Lode to it."

"The oath! the oath!" cried Pablo. "A long time ago you promised it, and I have served you without it. The girl is gone now; can you find her? Dare you throw yourself upon her trail, with Father Ferret, the Frisco detective, to play against you?"

All at once Queen Dora started forward as if a way out of the difficulty had dawned upon her.

"I can't keep you here, Pablo!" she exclaimed. "You must take the trail at once. The oath you shall have before you go. I swear, in the sight of Heaven, that I will keep my promise when Sybil is restored. Are you satisfied now?"

The eyes of the half-breed snapped like twin balls of fire.

"The trail is mine!" he cried. "Cristo! the bird that has left the mountain nest will be restored. They never baffle Pablo the Dark!"

"Go! go! bring her back! Without that girl the big game of my life will fall to the ground. I have just sent my bitter enemy to his death, but my revenge is not complete. Pablo, answer me one question: Can a tattoo be removed from the flesh without leaving a mark behind?"

The half-Indian slowly shook his head.

"Might it not be done?" continued Diamond Dora. "Suppose I told you that to-night, within the present hour, I saw a human bosom that had no tattoo, when I know that a few years ago one was there. What would you say, Pablo?"

"I would say that your eyes had fooled you."

"My eyes traitors?" and Diamond Dora sent a derisive laugh into the dark face of her Indian spy. "That cannot be! I know the tattoo was there when last I saw the owner, but to-night no traces of it remain. He has removed it in some manner. They do anything now, Pablo."

A faint smile appeared at the corners of the spy's mouth.

"You don't believe this," ejaculated Dora, catching that smile. "I am satisfied if you do remain in the dark. But to the trail now. If she went away, she took a horse—Whirlwind, perhaps."

There was a look, but no audible reply, a figure sprung from the cabin, and Diamond Dora, Queen of Bowie, was alone.

"He forced the oath from me at last!" she hissed, glancing beyond the door which the

half-breed had left open. "I have sworn to give Sybil to my dark-skinned spy when he brings her back. I am going to mate the dove with the serpent, am I?"

She went to the door as if she had heard a sudden noise, and listened there a little while with her figure half across the threshold.

"Must I do this? Am I obliged to keep an oath of this kind? I could get him on the trail by no other method. If Flash Frank, the alcalde, had not ran off, I might meet this cunning man with a fox when he comes back. He will find Sybil. He will fetch her back, and then demand her of me. Let it come! With Claude Stacey out of the way, and with Bowie Notch at my back, if Father Ferret finds a new hand, I guess I can meet this new trouble when it comes! Maybe I'll turn up in an entirely new role within a month, and who says there will not be a sensation in Frisco?"

Meanwhile, Pablo the Dark had gone to the stables where the few horses belonging to Bowie Notch were kept.

The light of victory was still in his eyes.

He went in among the horses and his voice was soon heard in a low cry of confirmation.

"The girl knew which horse to take!" exclaimed Pablo. "Whirlwind is as swift as the lightning and has the sense of a man."

Several minutes later a man emerged from the low stables but he was not alone. A horse with slender limbs and graceful neck followed him from the darkness, already equipped for a ride.

In a moment Pablo the Dark dropped into the light saddle and adjusted his feet in the stirrups.

"Now, Black Monte, you will help Pablo to the fairest wife in the gold regions!" cried the half-breed, and away went horse and man as if both already knew the trail that would lead them to Sybil, the Mystery of Bowie Notch.

Pablo the Dark could not keep down a wild laugh of satisfaction.

He was on the greatest hunt of his life, but Queen Dora's Indian-blooded spy was to discover that his equal lived in a person not unknown to the reader.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEW SECRET.

A WEEK passed away, a week of conjecture and poorly curbed impatience to the woman who ruled the stalwart Pards of Bowie Notch.

No news from Pablo the Dark; no sign that he had found the trail of Sybil.

Nothing from Father Ferret.

The flight of the girl had become known to the men of the gold camp.

They saw the impatience that could not keep Queen Dora quiet; they discussed it in the depths of the mountain mines and before the whisky-soaked bar of *La Paradiso*.

The prolonged absence of Flash Frank the alcalde was another mystery that puzzled them along with the secret of Sybil's flight, but none were bold enough to ask Diamond Dora about the tall sport.

It was the seventh night after Sybil's flight, and the Queen of Bowie Notch was alone in her cabin. Alone, but dressed in a close-fitting suit that did not hamper her nether limbs.

"My half-blood has failed or played me false!" she cried. "I am going to show him that the queen is as keen on the trail as her slave. A word of command to Big Burt will be enough. He has never betrayed me."

In another minute the cabin was quite deserted, and the captain of the queen's guards, Big Burt the giant sport, was astonished to see her enter his little shanty without a single warning that she was near.

"I am going away," ejaculated Dora looking down into the face of her captain.

"Away? alone?"

"Yes. Pablo stays, Captain Burt. Something has gone wrong."

In an instant Big Burt was on his feet.

"Send me!" he exclaimed. "Do you want the fellow brought back, or should I feel his weasand where I find him?"

"Leave that to me!" laughed the woman.

"You can't go alone from Bowie Notch!" was the resolute reply.

"Who is queen here, Captain Burt?" smiled Diamond Dora. "When did I abdicate in your favor, and make you King of Bowie Notch, eh, my friend?"

The deep dark eyes of Big Burt dropped.

"You remain here," Dora went on. "I am the one to hunt up my trail dog."

"He may have gone to Frisco."

"Then to Frisco I go also."

"Do you think—"

Big Burt paused as if about to enter forbidden ground.

"Do I think he has found the girl?" responded Dora. "I am not prepared to say, but I will find out. The camp is yours till I come back. You are not likely to have any visitors, but if any should come you want to look beneath their very skin, as it were. We shall not be troubled with Captain Bluff and his shadow Falcon. They have found the mysterious depths of Satan's Caldron, at least so you have reported, Captain Burt," and the Queen of Bowie Notch

gave her bronze servant a deep and searching look.

"If all your enemies were with them, Queen Dora, there'd be eternal quietude in Bowie Notch," he remarked.

"I have but one more if Pablo is not a traitor," was the quick answer.

"Father Ferret, eh?"

"The Frisco spotter!" cried the woman with bitterness. "He may be where I am going. I trust I shall meet this gold-camp shadower that I may tell him to his teeth that his master Claude Stacey and his tool, Falcon, have left the game. After that I want to show Father Ferret that a keen blade and a keener eye can, in a second, undo the work of a lifetime."

"Don't speak till I am through," continued Dora catching her breath as she leaned forward and clutched Big Burt's wrist. "I may not see you for days. I don't know whether this trail runs. I will not know till I have found it. If Pablo the Dark has played me false, the spy shall follow Captain Bluff! If I find him true, I will make his delay break the oath he forced from me."

"What oath?"

"I never told you!" cried Queen Dora, starting back.

"I know of no oath. He forced one from you, eh?" and the face of the big sport darkened with indignation.

"Yes!" said the woman through her teeth.

"What it was I need not tell you, Captain Burt, but it was an oath that made my blood boil. I could have strangled the half-blood with the vow on my lips, but the girl was gone, and I had to send him to the trail. I want to find this spy of mine. He forgets that I made him what he is, that I picked him up when he was bleeding from a dozen wounds, and that at the risk of my life I drove a dozen human wolves from his body and made him my Frisco spy. I am off now. If I stay here I will talk and lose the pair forever."

Diamond Dora retreated to the door and looked sharply into the face of the sport who stood erect in the lamplight and waited for final orders.

"Remember! take care of Bowie Notch!" she exclaimed. "You know the first rule of the camp: 'No more permanent citizens!' I leave no orders to shoot all strangers on sight. You will do as you think best. I repeat: Look under the skin of every new-comer. This big game of gold and hearts is not played out until the last card held against us has been trumped. I will hear your report when I come back. Heaven knows when that will be. I haven't the faintest idea, Captain Burt. Eyes open and pistols cocked! Let this be the motto of Bowie Notch!"

The last word was followed by the opening of the door, and Big Burt found himself looking out into the night with the footsteps of Diamond Dora already far away.

"What am I to do now?" suddenly ejaculated Captain Burt, and the interrogative seemed to deepen the puzzled expression that came to his dark countenance. "There is a secret in Bowie Notch kept by five men, which means four too many. The woman who has just gone after Aida, or Sybil as she is sometimes called, and Pablo, is likely to meet some one whom she must not see. Not for the world! A thousand to ten that the trail leads to Frisco. All trails lead thither! Shall I guard Bowie Notch while she rides away? Great Jericho! I can't afford to let Diamond Dora go to Frisco without posting some one there. It will never do."

In less than a minute Big Burt's cabin had no tenant.

He was walking with great strides toward the lamps of *La Paradiso*, and the dozen men beyond the door hailed his appearance with exclamations of pleasure.

"We war about ter toast ther queen, cap'n!" sung out the burliest of the dozen.

"The queen be banged!" grated Big Burt through clinched teeth, but he laughed with the rest, and joined with well-feigned zest in the toast which followed the big rough's words.

"I want you, Guy," he whispered to the wiry little man at whose side he had drank the toast. "Go to your cabin and await me there."

There followed a quick look of inquiry, and the company was soon rendered smaller in point of numbers by the withdrawal of the little man.

In due time Big Burt also took his departure, and all at once he sprang into a certain cabin, and leaned with blazing eyes toward the man who had been waiting for him.

"The secret is on the verge of discovery, Guy," he exclaimed.

The little man fell back and uttered an oath of amazement, as his eyes suddenly enlarged.

"The queen has left Bowie Notch. She won't stop this side of Frisco, for circumstances are bound to take her thar!" Big Burt went on.

"Unless he is warned, she is liable to encounter him thar. Then what becomes of us, eh, Gold Guy?"

"Jingo Joshua!" exclaimed the little sport.

"This can't be Cap'n Burt!"

"By the holy horns, it is!" flashed the Bowie Notch Goliath. "Don't you see what is to be done? Somebody must get ahead of Diamond

Dora. She hasn't been gone twenty minutes. She went to saddle Duke Lightning, if she hadn't him ready when she tackled me. She goes to find Dom Pablo, who left on the girl's trail a week ago. The trail will take her to Frisco. She doesn't fear any cross plays from Captain Bluff and Falcon, for they are exploring the Caldron you know, Guy. Ha! ha! She believes that she has only the detective to fight, and begins to think that he will abandon the girl's trail, now that Claude Stacey is gone. You know better than this, Guy. You have taken the same oath that binds me. We all—five of us—took it at the same time on the brink of that infernal Caldron. You must beat Queen Dora to Frisco."

"I see. It is a desperate game!" cried Gold Guy, the little sport.

"It throws our lives before the tiger eyes and the silken trigger of the woman we have served for years!" was the answer.

"I realize it, cap'n."

"Then you will go?"

"Yes."

"You will find him at Number Ten Nevada street. Get there ahead of this mistress of ours, and say to him: 'Diamond Dora is on the road to Frisco.' If he asks for more, tell him all you know."

"I will, but one thing before I go, Cap'n Burt."

"Well?"

The little sport let his right hand steal forward till it touched the arm of the giant sport.

"Mebbe you won't want ter tell me," he went on, meeting Big Burt's gaze. "But by Jupiter! I can't set out on this ride without knowing one thing."

"Go on. I'm no information bureau, Gold Guy, but I know a few things almighty well."

The countenance of the small man brightened.

"Tell me this," he went on. "Is the man of Frisco the real Claude Stacey? You know thar war no tattoo on his breast when we looked at it by Queen Dora's lamp."

All at once the stern features of Big Burt relaxed, and he laughed in Gold Guy's face till it seemed to grow purple.

"Who else was he?" he exclaimed. "Dora recognized him if the tattoo wasn't thar. What makes you doubt it, Guy of Juniper Gulch?"

"The last look he gave us!"

"Fiddlesticks! It is your duty to go to Frisco. You must get ahead of Queen Dora, which will not be hard to do. It is a long ride, but you have made it before. Don't forget the number—10 Nevada street! Nothing human nor supernatural must stop you this side of the coast city. You know what hangs in the balances—your life and mine, Gold Guy. When Queen Dora was here she talked about traitors and treason. What are we?" And Big Burt laughed till the little man signaled him to stop.

"I'll make the ride. I'll find the man on Nevada street!" he exclaimed. "Queen Dora may discover Pablo her spy and the beautiful seraph of Bowie Notch; but she shall not discover that we—you and I—Cap'n Burt, have played a game that forfeits our lives before her dropper!"

"Good! To Frisco, old boy! Hang me for a Greaser, but I'd trust you to outwit the devil!" And before he could reply Gold Guy was almost forced from the cabin and started toward the stables with a brain in a whirl.

"I'll keep Bowie Notch in shape, Queen Dora!" laughed Big Burt. "Find your spy and Sybil if you can. Gold Guy will prevent you from meeting the Frisco sport, and thus keep our secret safe. The game has taken a new turn and I hold a strange hand in it. If you meet the man in Frisco and come back here, somebody will have to die."

CHAPTER XV.

BLUE EYES ON DECK.

"THERE is no trail too hidden for me! I believe I could follow a bird through the air!"

The man who uttered these words in an audible tone rode into a small town of twenty cabins that nestled among the mountains and was unseen until the visitor was upon it.

The day was dying away in the west and the long shades of the pines were stealing over the camp.

There was something about the rider of the black horse that rendered him attractive. Perhaps it was his dark face or his very black eyes that seemed capable of reading a person's very thoughts.

He looked about with a calm air and kept on until he reached a cabin a little larger than the rest from which came the voices of men in laugh and boisterous conversation.

"Bull's Eye never changes!" ejaculated the rider. "I wonder if I will be remembered. When I was last here I left a good deal of dust with the card sharps of the camp. *Santa Cristo!* luck was all against me then. It has favored me of late, but not with cards. Aha! they've got onto me already!"

The last exclamation was caused by the sudden appearance of a dozen big dark-shirted individuals before the door of the cabin, and several hats were already off in deference to

the man who touched his hat with a gold band and smiled.

The welcome was cordial and undoubtedly so for a purpose, and when the dark-skinned stranger slipped from the saddle and landed in the very midst of the crowd, he was again greeted with shouts and wholesale hand-shaking.

"Bull's Eye's not been worth a cuss since you left!" cried one big sport. "Waltz inter Daisy Dan's and sample new Frisco nectar at my expense!" and before the stranger had a chance to refuse, he was picked up almost bodily and carried into the cabin where he was set down before a rough bar.

"Ov course you've come ter stay a while, Pablo!" exclaimed half a dozen men. "We've not got much on hand just now; but we'll throw it all inter ther scales ov fortune."

The dark-faced fellow smiled.

"I'm in the same fix. Little and little don't make much!" he laughed. "You'll let me go on ter Frisco without playing to-night, gents; when I come back—"

"Not much, pard!" interrupted one of the sports. "We want ter play now. Bull's Eye hezn't had a decent game since we disputed for each other's dust. Frisco will be ther to-morrow and next day, and forever. Bull's Eye wants a divers on."

"Well," said the new-comer, "I'll play a game or two."

The men of the little camp exchanged looks of satisfaction, and the crowd walked from the bar to a table in one corner of the room.

Pablo the Dark had turned up in Bull's Eye, a camp between Bowie Notch and San Francisco. If he had found Sybil, he was now alone, bound for the Californian city in Black Monte's saddle.

A week had intervened between his departure from Bowie Notch and his arrival in Bull's Eye.

Certain it is that he had not returned to Diamond Dora with a report.

The half-blood, with his cunning and reckless agility, may have been outwitted by the fair waif of the gold-diggings.

If Sybil had eluded him, why had he said, on the edge of Bull's Eye, that no trail was too hidden for him?

At any rate, when he acceded to the desires of the pards of the little camp, it told that he was in no hurry to reach San Francisco.

A few games would make no difference, and Pablo loved to play even when the stakes were not worth raking in.

Gambling was a passion with Diamond Dora's half-Indian spy, and the men of Bull's Eye knew that the first game would not be the last.

In a little while, the game in one corner of the cabin was under full way.

Pablo the Dark had pitted against him three of the best players in Bull's Eye, and an eager crowd hemmed the gamblers in like a living hedge.

Game after game went on.

Black Monte, faithful to the man who knew his worth, stood near the cabin with his nose against the door, waiting patiently for his master.

Dom Pablo won and lost alternately.

The stakes were not large, but large enough to give the game a thrilling interest.

It was the half-blood against Bull's Eye, and Bull's Eye had no mercy and did not know when to let up.

Pablo's eyes got a new glitter every now and then, but adverse fortune would blunt its edge, and with his famous oath, "*Santa Cristo!*" he would make another attempt to retrieve the day.

He did not stop with a few games.

The old love of gambling got a firmer hold on him as the minutes wore on, and the stakes multiplied on the opposite side of the table.

He seemed to forget his gold camp mistress, Sybil, too, and the mission to San Francisco as well, if one were taking him there.

Black Monte grew impatient at last and began to call his master, but Dom Pablo did not hear a single note.

Midnight came and the game, with its exasperating turns of fortune was still the event of Bull's Eye.

Dom Pablo at last began to play with a cunning he had not shown before.

The gold of Bull's Eye came back, pot by pot, to his side of the table.

"Jehul it takes the Injun a long while ter get the hang ov things!" cried a spectator. "If it keeps on this way Bull's Eye's a bankrupt corporation!"

Diamond Dora's spy took his success as coolly as he had lately received the reverses of fortune.

All saw the desire that now animated him.

He wanted to close the play and depart, but he did not want to go without the golden scalps of the sports of the little camp.

Bull's Eye played with all her vim and shrewdness, but with no avail.

Dom Pablo had the run and was keeping it unbroken with aggravating coolness.

The lookers on grew excited, their dark eyes exchanged glances with the men who played against the half-blood.

Pablo appeared to see nothing.

At his elbow was a pile of coin which almost represented the entire wealth of Bull's Eye.

At last one by one the spectators slipped away and left the cabin, but after awhile they came back in the same manner and resumed their old places.

All at once one of the half-blood's opponent's threw down his hand with an exclamation that attracted every one.

"I'm out!" he cried. "The devil is in league with you, Pablo. We had him corraled when you were here before, but you buzzed him in the mountain, and got him on your side. You've got the dust ov Bull's Eye, but *how?*"

The half-Indian did not appear to have heard the insinuation poorly hidden in the last word.

The game was out at last, and he knew that he had the possessions of his antagonists.

The stacks of coin at his left did not represent much, but to Pablo the Dark they were the results of a victory that made his eyes twinkle.

When he last left Bull's Eye he was a beggar; now he was its treasurer!

With a quiet movement he began to lower the glittering yellow stacks and to transfer them to his pockets.

The Pards of Bull's Eye looked on with eyes that fairly blazed with rage, but nobody made a restraining gesture.

Pablo at last pushed the rough bench back, and got up under his load of gold coin.

"I'll go to Frisco, now," he exclaimed, addressing the crowd that awaited him with that silence which sometimes precedes a storm. "Maybe when I land here again, gents, fortune will show up on the other side."

"She's goin' ter show up thar now, Injun!" cried a big sport, and at his voice the crowd surged forward, forcing Pablo almost against the table.

The half-blood saw the import of the movement the instant it was made.

The black eyes took fire at once and one of his dark hands made a flying movement toward his hip.

"Why don't yer draw?" laughed half a dozen in the crowd as a wild expression came to Pablo's face. "Bull's Eye for tricks, Injun; Bowie Notch for darn fools!"

Pablo the Dark felt his teeth strike like foes at these words.

The sheath of his revolver was empty, and he knew that the deft fingers of some bronze pick-pocket had relieved him during the game!

For all this he did not seem to consider himself at the mercy of the crowd that pressed him, and showed by their looks that they wanted more than their lost gold.

"We want vengeance, Pablo," cried the crowd.

"Vengeance for what?"

"Fer ther disgrace ov Bull's Eye! Don't you know you're at our mercy?"

The half-Indian straightened and looked ready for a leap straight into the faces of the crowd.

"Cover him! Quick! Thar's blood in ther brown tiger's eye! Charge!"

The next second the crowd rushed forward as one man!

There was a collision just before the table was struck, and when the pards of Bull's Eye drew back Pablo the Dark was in the hands of six!

It was the work of less than a second, and a wild shout hailed the victory.

"Finish ther Injun whar he is! We'll send his ghost ter Frisco an' his body ter ther mountains. By Jupiter! he shall never boast that he flected Bull's Eye single-handed!"

A yell of approval followed these words, and a rope whirled swiftly before the half-blood's eyes.

A table was placed in the middle of the cabin, and the tallest sport in the house mounted it and began to adjust a lasso around one of the rough rafters overhead.

"Thar she hangs!" cried the lank individual, springing from the table, and all saw the dangling rope with its noose of dark hair, as it waited for Queen Dora's spy.

A moment of silence followed and then Pablo was pushed forward.

It was to be quick work.

Bull's Eye was in no humor to prolong an execution.

"Hold on, gentlemen! A moment, if you please? I have business with the man in your trap!"

These words came from the cabin door.

There was nothing stern about them, and when the startled pards looked they saw a little man with gray hair and deep blue eyes!

CHAPTER XVI.

ONE MAN AND A CROWD.

THE would-be executioners of Pablo the Dark leaned toward the man in the shanty door, holding their breath in illy suppressed excitement, and with fingers within the polished trigger-guard.

"What is it you want, eh?" inquired the leader of the mob, the first one to find his tongue.

"I have business with the man in your hands."

"Who ar' you?"

"Dom Pablo knows!" and a smile curled the lips of the little speaker.

Yes, the dark shadower knew as his eyes riveted upon the interloper from the first told the group at Daisy Dan's.

"We can't let you see the prisoner till we know who you ar' an' what your business is with him."

The blue-eyed man left the door and came forward. His step was springy and almost cat-like, and every eye was fixed upon him.

"Gentlemen, I am called Father Ferret," he said, halting before the crowd with his well-molded figure drawn to perfect height. "My business with the man under the rope is a matter entirely my own."

"A case of dollars an' cents, hey?"

"More than that!" cried Father Ferret. "He has played against Bull's Eye and your dust is in his pockets. I know it is a peculiar rule of this camp that no man shall leave it flush. Pablo the Dark was going off in this condition, hence the table and the noose."

"Bet yer life, Father Ferret!" was the angry response.

"Well, you can empty his pockets—you can take back what once belonged to you, and then turn him over to me."

"That's fair!" whispered somebody, at the edge of the crowd.

"How does it strike you, Pablo?" asked the leader.

The eyes of the half-blood shadower glittered a second before he replied.

"You can do what you please," he spoke, through clinched teeth. "You and he are playing now. I am only the stake in the game."

"Does that mean that you hev no choice?" cried the big captain of Bull's Eye's mob. "Don't you intend to choose between that man and the lasso?"

"No."

The reply was spoken in a tone of complete indifference as if Pablo truly meant it.

"What's the decision, gentlemen?" suddenly asked the Frisco detective.

"We'll take the dust," was the answer.

"Only your own—remember! I don't want this man robbed."

The next moment some picked up the table and set it before Dom Pablo, and a bronze hand was put into his pockets.

The work of recovery did not last long, but while it went on it was watched eagerly by the whole party, the most eagerly perhaps by Pablo himself.

Woe to the Pards of Bull's Eye, his looks said, if they took more than their own!

As the coins were produced they were counted into three piles on the table until the half-blood's antagonists declared that all their losses had been recovered.

Nothing was said about the revolver which somebody's deft fingers had abstracted from the spy's pocket.

Perhaps they were afraid to restore that after the cool indignity they had perpetrated.

"Thar's yer man!" exclaimed the head of the avengers, and the next second he pushed Pablo toward the blue-eyed man waiting quietly for him.

Father Ferret's hand darted forward and closed on the spy's arm.

"One word," hissed Pablo the Dark.

"Not one," was the detective's retort. "You don't want to complicate matters with your tongue. You can think, but not talk, till I want to hear you. Come with me."

"Take him away, or Bull's Eye may take more than its own!" cried the big leader. "He wants ter give this paradise a wide berth from now till the day of judgment!"

"*Santa Cristo!* an' you don't want to inhabit it wher I come back!" thundered the half-blood, as he whirled up in the crowd despite Father Ferret's grip. "For each dollar taken from Meralie's son to-night he will have an ounce of human blood!"

The stalwart figures of the swarthy pards started forward.

Revolvers clicked everywhere.

"Gentlemen, don't force me to close quarters," coolly spoke the Frisco shadower, and the hand that went up held a six-shooter. "I transact my business with this man at the risk of my life. He threatens to come back and take blood for dollars. Having warned you, you will be on the lookout for him. The warning is fair, but he may not return."

"Do you mean he will not?"

"No. The near future decides Dom Pablo's fate. If I am ever wanted for this rescue, you have but to send me word, and if I am not engaged I'll answer the summons in person. My address is Hotel Occidental, room 28, San Francisco. Ask for Father Ferret."

The gold-camp detective drew off with his prisoner as he delivered the address, and the pair were at the door before the roughs of Bull's Eye realized that their intended victim was actually getting away.

They stood like a pack of wolves half at bay, unwilling to give the half-blood up, yet not quite ready to throw themselves upon the revolver of the Frisco spotter.

Before they decided what to do the old shad-

ower and his man stepped from Daisy Dan's den, and the Bull's Eye mob looked through an open door.

The opportunity had passed, and the half-Indian gambler was gone.

"Looks to me as if I put my hand in in the nick of time," laughed Father Ferret to the man he had conducted from the cabin ranch. "The Bull's Eye tigers had you foul, Pablo."

"You think so?" cried the spy, derisively.

"You had no 'hand' left—not one."

There was no answer to this remark, for at that moment Dom Pablo discovered that his horse was gone.

Father Ferret caught the look, and instantly divined its meaning.

"The horse will turn up all right," he smiled, and then added:

"That is, Pablo, if you play fair with me."

"Try me," said Queen Dora's spy. "What kind of a game are you up to now?"

Before Father Ferret replied he was beyond the last cabin at the eastern terminus of the camp, and the narrow trail to San Francisco was visible in the starlight.

"Jordan!" called the detective in a low voice, and a man came forward.

"This is Jordan," he continued, introducing a young man to Dom Pablo. "You know him, Pablo. You saw him in Frisco before you went up to Bowie Notch with your report for Diamond Dora. Jordan has had the pleasure of following you on several occasions in Frisco, but you were a little too slick for him, ha, ha!"

Dom Pablo smiled as he looked into the face of the tall and very handsome youth who had come up.

"I know Jordan," he said. "He is still watching me, I see."

Then he suddenly became serious, and turned upon Father Ferret with all his Indian blood aroused.

"Now, what is your business with Pablo?" he exclaimed.

"We can transact it in a little while. You will answer one question—where is the girl who left Bowie Notch alone a week ago?"

The half-breed grinned.

"Is Father Ferret on a trail that has fooled him?" he cried. "And why does he come to Pablo with his tongue?"

"No twisting," said the Frisco spotter, sternly. "The girl left Bowie Notch alone, and you followed at the command of the Gold-Camp Queen. It does not take you a week to come up with a young girl who is unacquainted with the mountains."

"What is at stake? Pablo would like to know."

"More than you think!" and the detective's eyes glistened. "The girl's identity is not unknown to you. You know her worth and her history as well as we do. Come, Pablo, this is a deeper game than the one you played in New Mexico among the mines before you were transferred to Frisco as Queen Dora's watchdog. What are you going to say to my question?"

"I can't say anything."

Dom Pablo seemed to bite the words in two before they were entirely pronounced.

"All right," answered Father Ferret with a glance at Jordan. "Bring up the horse, boy."

Jordan disappeared but came back in a minute holding the bridles of three steeds.

Dom Pablo recognized his own horse, Black Monte, and the animal put forward his slender head joyously as if he knew his dark-skinned master.

"You will let us have our way, Pablo," resumed Father Ferret producing a rope with which he suddenly manacled the half-blood's wrist. "I did not take you from the gamblers of Bull's Eye to give you a chance to turn the tables. Maybe you would like to know what has happened at Bowie Notch since your departure. The queen could not wait for your report. You kept it back too long."

"What! is Queen Dora gone?" ejaculated Dom Pablo starting slightly.

"She has taken to the trail herself."

The half-blood spy fell into a thoughtful silence during which Father Ferret felt his muscles twitch and saw a look of eagerness cross his face.

"Where are you going with me?" he suddenly asked.

"To Frisco."

"Why to Frisco?"

"You will know when you get there."

"Santa Cristo! you don't want to take me to the Gold City!" cried the half-blood.

"You may have a chance to report to Diamond Dora there. She wants to find you, Pablo. She believes that you have betrayed her."

"Not to Frisco!" cried the half-Indian as if he had not heard the last words. "If you take Pablo the Dark to the city all is lost forever. The game you play will end where you do not want it to finish. The girl—the prize of the play—is not there! Not to Frisco if you want to beat Diamond Dora! Cristo! the hand must be played out in the mountains!"

"Then up into the saddle and show me the trail!" exclaimed the detective. "Here! lend a hand, Jordan. Black Monte gets his rider once more."

Before he could speak again Dom Pablo was in the saddle between the Frisco ferret and his companion.

"Remember! this is a game for more than millions!" cried Father Ferret leaning toward the half-blood. "You are now in the hands of Faro Fan's husband, and woe to you if you play him false!"

The dark skin of Dom Pablo seemed to get a lighter shade.

"Cristo! then you are he?" he cried, staring into the detective's eyes.

Father Ferret's lips suddenly met with firmness, and his hand closed at the Indian's wrist.

"Ride up the road, Jordan," he said, with a meaningful glance at his young companion.

The command was promptly obeyed, and Pablo and the detective were alone.

"Now, Pablo, let me talk," and the face of Father Ferret almost touched the half-breed's.

"My heart is in this hunt," he went on. "I am going to make it the last one of my life. I want to clear up one of the mysteries of California. I am more than Faro Fan's husband. You don't know me, Dom Pablo, although you dogged my steps repeatedly for your queen!"

Dom Pablo gave Father Ferret a look of wonder.

CHAPTER XVII.

BEATEN.

"In the Holy Mother's name, who are you?" ejaculated the half-blood as he looked into the old man's face.

Father Ferret answered with a smile that mystified Dom Pablo still more.

"Not very much of a mystery, but a sort of one for all," he laughed, and when his face suddenly became serious, he went on: "While Jordan waits for us up the road, Pablo, let me tell you part of a story."

Dom Pablo said nothing, but waited for Father Ferret to proceed.

"In southern New Mexico, among the old Spanish silver-camps, as some people call them, once lived a man who was known as a bonanza king, because he held the key to a great deal of unmined treasure. This person, known as Hidalgo Dick, had a daughter, a child by a Mexican wife. In the course of time the child grew to womanhood, with the notion that she was to become a silver queen. Her father was found dead one night in a little room in one of the mines he owned—a room which was known to no one, it was thought, but Hidalgo Dick and his daughter.

"There was nothing to show that the mine-owner had been murdered, but there were evidences that a robbery of some kind had taken place. A lot of papers taken from their place by fingers that were not Hidalgo Dick's told some that the miner had been visited by some person either before or after death. The daughter knew nothing. She said that she could not tell how important her father's papers were. He was very rich, but how rich she did not know.

"After awhile, when Hidalgo Dick had been buried, it turned out that he wasn't as rich as he was thought to have been. Certain parties from different quarters came in and showed papers in the miner's handwriting that took the mines from the daughter. There was found among Hidalgo Dick's papers a kind of will that gave the child certain mines in some unknown part of California. It was certain that the will had been accompanied by diagrams of the location of these mines, but the diagrams were never found.

"The daughter, called Onez for her Mexican mother, went away with all her hopes crushed. She saw that she would never be a bonanza queen, and after awhile she married an American, who did not know anything about her family."

Father Ferret paused here and looked away for a moment.

"Onez and her husband did not get along very well," he resumed suddenly. "Not long after the birth of a daughter, Onez went off between two days, and then the child was stolen from the father."

Dom Pablo started slightly and then smiled as if he saw something singular in the detective's narrative.

"What is it?" asked Father Ferret.

"Nothing; go on."

"I ought to stop here, but I will take you a step further," was the reply. "The lost mines mentioned in Hidalgo Dick's will belong to his grand-daughter. The miner had a deed for them that will hold in any court of law in California. All that is wanting to prove them is the diagram, which I believe disappeared the night Hidalgo Dick died in his little office underground. This, Dom Pablo, is a part of my hunt—to find Hidalgo Dick's heir, and to restore her to her rights. The mother—she is dead!"

"And the girl? Santa Cristo! A long time has passed away since, and she may be dead too."

Father Ferret shook his head.

"The child is not dead!" he exclaimed resolutely.

"Ha! you know that?"

"I do."

"Then why don't you find her?"

"I will."

"Why do you hunt the woman of Bowie Notch? Ah! Captain Bluff, or Claude Stacey, Diamond Dora's husband has employed you!"

"I promised him to find Sybil, his child," continued the spotter. "I tell you, Dom Pablo, there are two trails in this game. I never leave them both at one time."

"I don't see what your story about Hidalgo Dick has to do with Claude Stacey and his hunt!" cried the half-blood.

"I have not said that it is in any way connected with it," was the quick response. "I have followed two trails at once before. Hidalgo Dick's mines suddenly failed after his death, as if a curse had come upon them. They refused to yield at all, and were abandoned, so the men who took all he was worth from his child did not prosper. I was on a trail of my own when Claude Stacey found me in Frisco, and engaged me to find Sybil, his daughter, as he says, by the Mexican wife.

"I have thrown my whole heart into the hunt. I know that Diamond Dora, Queen of Bowie Notch, has kept the child so secure that Captain Bluff and his shadow Falcon failed to find her."

"Which girl do you want to find most—Sybil or the daughter of Onez?" asked Pablo.

"Oh, I'm not very particular!" smiled the detective. "But I will find Sybil first, because I have found you!"

At that moment the half-blood's eyes got a new flash, and his hands moved suddenly, but not far, for the cords about them held them fast.

"You can't get away," whispered Father Ferret. "You are completely in my hands, and I want you to show me the girl you followed from Bowie Notch a week ago at Queen Dora's command."

"Maybe you'd like to see your wife's grave. I buried her."

The detective started.

"I thank you for that mark of respect to her!" he said. "You knew her as Faro Fan. To me she had another name."

"Yet, to Diamond Dora you denied that she was your wife."

"I was playing a bluff game then," was the answer. "I was in your queen's trap, and a lie had to help me out. Faro Fan killed herself because I came to Bowie Notch, in search of her, she wrongly thought. The truth is, I did not know what had become of her until Diamond Dora showed me her death-writing. It was a surprise that nearly took my breath, but I lied it down. Now, Dom Pablo, let us understand one another. You are playing for Diamond Dora, or were when you left Bowie Notch. I am working for Claude Stacey and for myself. What are you going to do?"

The half-blood caught the determined look which gleamed in the detective's eyes.

"Call your man, Jordan," he said to Father Ferret. "We are going away from here."

"To Sybil?"

Dom Pablo nodded slightly, and the detective sent forth a signal that soon brought Jordan riding back.

As the young man drew rein alongside of Dom Pablo, that worthy leaned toward him and gave him a deep and searching look.

"Where are you from, Jordan?" asked the camp queen's spy.

"From San Francisco."

"Always lived there?"

"Yes."

"Cristo! I don't believe it!" ejaculated Pablo, between his teeth. "This young white man is a part of the California mystery."

"Come! you need not waste time trying to get at Jordan's history," cried Father Ferret. "The young man hasn't got any worth looking after. You are to show us where Sybil is. Let's be off!"

Dom Pablo drew his elegant figure up in the saddle and gave the Frisco shadow a look of rage.

"Did you tell me that Diamond Dora had left Bowie Notch?" he asked.

"She is gone."

"After Sybil?"

"After Sybil and you."

"Where does she expect to find us?"

"In Frisco."

"Why there?"

"I don't exactly know."

"Then we go to Frisco!" and Pablo's lips shut firmly behind the last word.

"By Jupiter! you don't play a game of this kind!" exclaimed Father Ferret, dashing toward his prisoner and clutching his wrist. "A while ago when I threatened to take you to Frisco you objected. Now you want to go. The girl isn't there. She is somewhere between Bull's Eye and Bowie Notch. We go to her, not to Frisco."

"So you say, Father Ferret," cried the half-blood, with a cunning and defiant smile at his lips. "If I am to go to Sybil between Bull's Eye and Bowie Notch you will take me."

A moment later the starlight fell upon something white in the Frisco detective's hand and

Dom Pablo the Dark was looking into the muzzle of a six-shooter!

"Sybil, or your brains, my cunning hound!" vociferated the detective. "Swear by the Virgin you profess to cherish that you will conduct us straight to the girl, or I will give the grass under you a terrible stain!"

Dom Pablo did not move a muscle.

On the contrary, a determined look deepened in his eyes, and he met Father Ferret's glare with the coolness of a desperado who knows he is bound to win the game despite the odds against him.

"Quick!" continued the gold camp shadower. "This is a game of trigger and trumps! Will you go to Sybil?"

"I will go to Frisco!" was spoken before the leveled weapon. "If Father Ferret shoots Pablo the girl will never be found by his keen eyes. I will go to Frisco first."

"When we get there, what?" asked the detective through his teeth.

"Pablo will know then. He cannot look ahead!"

Jordan, who was looking on, saw keen disappointment visible in Father Ferret's eyes.

Did he believe that to shoot Pablo from the saddle would be to lose Sybil?

It looked that way.

"Curse the luck! the Indian knows the strength of the hand he holds!" exclaimed Father Ferret to himself. "He has suddenly altered his mind, and wants to go to Frisco for a purpose. Is it because Diamond Dora has gone thither? Well, to Frisco it is!" and the revolver that had menaced the half-blood's life was lowered.

"We are going west," said the detective to Dom Pablo. "If anything happens to Sybil during our absence, I shall hold you responsible."

"You take a great interest in Claude Stacey's daughter," responded the spy. "Don't you know that Diamond Dora is her mother?"

"You can't tell me anything, Pablo!" cried Father Ferret. "I know that you are Moralie's son, and that the other night in Bowie Notch, when you stood face to face with Falcon, you saved your life by adverting to this fact. But if you play us false in one particular, either on the trail to Frisco or in the city itself, the name of Moralie shall not stay my hand."

Dom Pablo gave the detective a look, but did not speak.

"Watch this man as you would a hawk, Jordan," Father Ferret said to his companion. "He is cool, quick and cunning: Diamond Dora made his education in guile complete. If he attempts a slick play, kill him in the saddle!"

"No slick plays, Father Ferret," laughed Dom Pablo. "You will get me safely to Frisco on my part. *Santa Cristo!* I know a thing or two."

A moment later all three were off.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NUMBER TEN NEVADA STREET.

WE must now go back to a certain man whom we saw last riding from Bowie Notch well mounted, and with a commission to get to San Francisco as quickly as possible.

This person, as the reader will readily recall, is Gold Guy, the sport sent by Big Burt from the gold camp with instructions to get ahead of Diamond Dora on the Frisco road.

Gold Guy's main business was to deliver a certain message to a man supposed to be at number ten Nevada street, and that message, as we know, was to post him about the Gold Queen's journey.

Whether the rider got ahead of Queen Dora or not, certain it is that he rode into San Francisco with a look of victory in his eyes.

It was not far from the close of day when he accomplished this feat, and in a little while had turned his steed into Nevada street.

Nobody seemed to have followed Gold Guy, and he had a right to congratulate himself upon his success.

Number Ten, Nevada street, was almost at the northern end of it, a plain-looking frame house with shutters, and some trees in front.

The number above the door was large enough to let the sharp eyes of the sport detect it from the road, and a minute after the discovery he had dismounted and was at the door itself.

The portal was opened by a man whose rather heavy grayish beard made him look older than his agility and his eyes indicated, and after a hurried but sharp scrutiny Guy was admitted and conducted to a room near at hand.

"Well!" said the gray-bearded individual as if he expected news of some kind. "What brings you to Frisco?"

The man from Bowie Notch threw a quick look around the room, and then covered the space between the stranger and himself by a long stride.

"Queen Dora is on her way to Frisco," he cried in a significant whisper. "I came all the way from the camp to tell you this."

"Why to tell me?" inquired the man with a singular smile.

"This is Number Ten, Nevada street, is it not?"

"Yes."

"And you are—"

Gold Guy hesitated as if afraid to speak what might be a profound secret.

"Oh, it is all right, I guess," ejaculated the messenger's confronter. "I'm the man you want to see. Who sent you?"

"Cap'n Burt."

"And Diamond Dora is coming here?"

"Yes."

"On what kind of an errand?"

"She wants to find the girl."

The man of the house started.

"The girl? Then—"

"Don't you know?" exclaimed Gold Guy.

"The girl Dora sometimes called Sybil but oftener Aida ran away a week ago."

"Sybil! Sybil! My God!" cried the man, and his hand was at the sport's arm in a trice.

"This girl—was—she—in Bowie Notch?"

"Didn't you know it? Why, she's been there a long time."

"If I had known it!" was the response, and the man's eyes got a wild look. "Go on—quick! She ran off, you say?"

"Yes, and Dora sent Pablo the Dark after her, but the half Injun has not reported."

"So she took the trail herself, eh?"

"That's exactly what she's done! She believed that both Sybil and Pablo have come to Frisco," Gold Guy went on, "but I came from Cap'n Burt to tell you that Queen Dora is heading this way, and you know we don't want you two to meet in Frisco."

"I'll attend to that, but I'm interested in the girl."

"In her more than in Diamond Dora?"

"Yes! You are sure you have not been watched?"

"Who would watch me?" cried Gold Guy. "I certainly beat Queen Dora to the city, and you now stand forewarned."

"You have my thanks," was the answer. "I guess I am equal to the emergency. When will this female sleuth strike Frisco?"

"If nothing detains her she will get in to-night. She is riding Duke Lightning, the best horse in the stables after the one Aida or Sybil took. I got ahead of her by a trail which I think she knew nothing about, therefore I can say that she is coming. We don't want Diamond Dora to recognize you. You know why?"

The man of the house nodded while his eyes twinkled.

"It is all understood," he said. "I can't say that I blame Big Burt and his friends. If you go back to Bowie Notch you can tell him that the secret will not be betrayed."

"I am going to rest here. It has been an age since I hit Frisco and now's a chance for me to see the sights."

"You want to keep out of Queen Dora's way as Gold Guy. If you are seen here the cause of your coming may be suspected by the mountain lions."

"You can bank on me!" laughed Gold Guy. "I always have my head on my shoulders and the machinery inside never runs down."

A few minutes later the Bowie Notch sport emerged from Number Ten Nevada street, and remounted the horse that waited for him among the shrubbery before the house.

He had hardly shut the front door when the tenant of the house opened the portal of a room adjoining the one in which the interview had taken place.

"This is news!" he exclaimed to a younger man who greeted him, and in the dusk he saw the listener's eyes light up.

"The gold-camp tigress is coming to Frisco, eh?" was the response. "I heard every word. I did not let one syllable of Gold Guy's report escape. Big Burt has an eye to personal safety, I see." And the speaker laughed.

"The girl, Sybil, was at Bowie Notch all the time!" cried the man with the gray beard.

"They called her Aida there. Father Ferret was not keen enough to discover this, and he is very keen. With Dora in Frisco and with Sybil and Pablo here also, what is to be done?"

"We must make a cool play and a deep one. It is better for us that the game goes on here on our own ground than in Bowie Notch on hers. We know every corner of this city. We are familiar with its man-traps and its dark trails. The man who has just left the house is known as the most reckless gambler in Bowie Notch. He will play wherever he can find a game, without thinking about disguising himself."

"Which means that he must not be permitted to do this?"

"Just so!" cried the young man.

"If Diamond Dora should see him here so soon there is no telling what she might suspect. I will follow Gold Guy. I will see that he does not recklessly expose himself while he is in Frisco."

"When will you report?"

"Within two hours."

"Then go."

Once more the occupant of No. 10 Nevada street was alone, and soon afterward the man who had just got in from Bowie Notch was approached by a stranger, who came up as he emerged from a second-class hotel.

"Stranger, I take you to be fond of a quiet

game," said this person to Gold Guy. "You're from the mountains, are you not?"

"From everywhere," exclaimed the Bowie Notch sport, taking in his questioner at a glance, from head to foot.

"Well, I'm from Mendocino. I've been a week in Frisco, midway between fortune and failure, and always looking for a man who likes a quiet game."

Gold Guy's eyes appeared to sparkle.

If there was anything the gold-diggings sport liked it was a quiet game with an easy victim, and his eyes indicated that he thought he had found his man.

"Do you ever play?" asked the man from Mendocino.

"Sometimes," said Gold Guy, trying to show some veridancy in his tones.

"I'm no bonanza king, but no mountain Lazarus," was the answer. "If I owe Notch wants to cross swords with Mendocino, I see nothing to prevent."

"Neither do I."

"Come along, then," and the stranger's arm was linked into that of Gold Guy, and the messenger from Bowie Notch found himself walking away like a victim.

If Gold Guy had looked deep into the eyes of the man at his side he might have seen something familiar; but in his eagerness to play he did not think that he was anybody else than a person from Mendocino.

The walk from the place of introduction was one of brief duration.

The stranger led Guy into a prominent-looking building and up a flight of steps to a small room well carpeted and having all the appearances of a quiet place.

A small oval table stood in the middle of the room and two chairs were already in position.

Gold Guy saw these simple appointments by the gas jet which his companion lighted. The man from Mendocino found a pack of cards in the table drawer, and threw them on the table with a light laugh.

"Look 'em over and see whether all's square," he remarked to Guy who seated himself in one of the chairs and picked up the pack.

"I'm going to order something for the interior man."

The Bowie Notch sport saw his companion walk to one corner of the room and reach up toward a rope that hung from the ceiling.

"What'll you take?" he cried over his shoulder to Guy.

"Claret!" said the rider from Bowie Notch.

"I'll take—*safety*, ha, ha!" was the response.

At the same time the man from Mendocino gave the rope a quick hard jerk.

The effect was instant and startling.

The floor opened like a trap under Gold Guy's feet!

He sprang up with a piercing cry, the cards falling from his hands, and tried to throw himself back, but too late.

All at once man, table, and chairs disappeared in the opening, and with another cry from Gold Guy's throat the trap came back, and the demon from Mendocino released the rope!

There was a devil's leer of satisfaction in his eyes as he looked toward the spot quite vacant now.

Just beyond the rim of the trap lay a few cards that had fluttered from Gold Guy's hands.

"It cannot be said that I don't know the traps of Frisco!" he laughed audibly as he gathered up the cards and thrust them into his pocket. "We can't take chances with this fellow loose on the streets and Diamond Dora's eyes ever on the alert. He was a little too fond of a quiet game for his own good, ha, ha! It behooves us to play deep with no Gold Guys about. If Sybil and Pablo the Dark are in Frisco, they will be hunted down. I will now go back with my report."

The man from Mendocino left the building and went straight to Number 10 Nevada street.

"That man won't be seen by Diamond Dora when she comes," he reported to the man who waited for him beyond the door. "We had a quiet, a very quiet game all to ourselves, and Gold Guy lost. But something has happened since I went away. I see by your eyes—"

"Yes, something has taken place," and the speaker snatched an evening paper from the table. "Look here! The man who was choked into insanity in the Eldorado over a month ago by Captain Bluff has escaped from the hospital."

"The Old Nick he has!"

"The papers tell it all in a paragraph, and, what is more, he is supposed to be in his right mind again."

The younger man read the article in silence and his companion faced him breathless and excited.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CITY TRAIL.

THE trap which had been so adroitly sprung on Gold Guy by the man from Mendocino was believed to be enough to prevent Diamond Dora from meeting the messenger when she should arrive in San Francisco.

There was no telling into what depths the man had been thrown, and the cool character who sprung the trap had walked away without investigating the results of his catch.

We have followed him to the house known as Number Ten, Nevada street, and have seen him startled by a newspaper paragraph in which was detailed the escape of a hospital patient, the man choked almost to death by Captain Bluff in the early stages of our romance.

There was nothing in the paragraph to attract the attention of the average reader, but the two men on Nevada street seemed of a right to be alarmed over it.

What startled them most was the last sentence of the account.

This stated that the man had recovered his reason and that he was supposed to have escaped with the connivance of a surgeon connected with the hospital.

"If he is at large and right again he must be hunted up!" said the man from Mendocino.

"Or hunted down!" was the answer. "Don't you know that that infernal newspaper paragraph tore me all up the moment I saw it. 'Heavens!' thinks I, 'that man loose and with his head clear once more?' The item was a thunderbolt, and it fell just when I was seeing my way to a good play ahead. The messenger won't be seen by Queen Dora when she comes, eh? You beat him at a quiet game, did you?"

"I did," laughed the man who had beaten Gold Guy. "The fool is famous for quiet games. I happened to know his infirmity, and catered to it in boss style. She won't run against him when she comes in, therefore she will not suspect our existence. She isn't far behind Gold Guy. When she comes to Frisco her hotel is the Occidental."

"It must be watched."

"It shall be! If you will leave this job to me, cap'n, an early report will be made."

"Take it," was the answer. "If the tigress of Bowie Notch comes to Frisco on the girl's trail, or if Pablo the Dark has brought his prize into the city, I want to know it immediately. With Sybil in my hands I'll open a mine that will throw all the El Dorados of earth into the shade. Give me Sybil and the game will not be hard to play."

For a few minutes longer the house on Nevada street was inhabited by two men, and then one retired and left the other alone.

It was the man from Mendocino who went out.

Night had fallen over the city of San Francisco, but the lamps threw the man's figure against the buildings at intervals.

He pushed rapidly toward the central part with the agile step of eager youth, and did not pause until he passed into the brilliantly lit office of the Hotel Occidental.

A moment later he exchanged glances with a boy of sixteen, whose appearance showed him to be an *attache* of the hotel, and the two passed from the office together.

"Any new guests, Max?" asked the man from Mendocino, eagerly, and his piercing eyes seemed to look the boy through.

"We're always getting something new," smiled the youth.

"But any particular guests, I mean?—any woman?"

"Yes, a woman just came in, and she's in the dining-room now."

"Did she come by rail?"

"No. She rode up to the private entrance on a daisy horse."

The man from Mendocino started slightly.

"What is she like?" he asked.

"Rather tall, black-eyed, and well shaped."

"No name on the register?"

"Not yet."

"Can I get a peep at this new guest?"

"I think so. Come this way. We can look into the dining-room from the yard."

The two—man and boy—walked out into an uncovered court behind the hotel.

"Look in at that window," exclaimed the boy, grasping Mendocino's wrist and pointing toward a lighted window. "You will see a woman at a table. That is the new guest."

The man leaned forward with a great deal of curiosity visible in his dark eyes.

"It is she!" he suddenly cried. "By Jupiter! it is the Queen of Bowie Notch!"

"The queen of what?" ejaculated the boy, looking up into his face.

"Never mind, Max; you don't have to know," was the answer, and for several moments the man kept his position and eagerly watched the woman.

The guest who had come to the Hotel Occidental on horseback was quietly enjoying a meal alone at one of the tables of the dining-room. She was totally unconscious of the espionage to which she was being subjected, and she seemed bent on satisfying a hunger brought about by a long ride in the saddle.

"Has she been watched by anybody since she arrived, Max?" suddenly asked the man.

The boy shook his head.

"Has the man who always prefers Room 98 come back?"

"Father Ferret, eh?"

"Yes."

"Not unless he dropped in when I wasn't looking for him," was the response. "I wasn't told particularly to look out for him, you know."

"That is true, but the old shadower is in the bill just the same."

"I'll go and see if he is here," and the boy started off, but was suddenly detained by the man from Mendocino.

"Father Ferret is not here. I'll vouch for that!" he said, smiling slightly. "I am interested in that woman just now. She is going to quit the table. I don't care whether she registers or not. She is known to me and that is sufficient. You want to stay on guard, Max. If she quits the hotel or receives any callers when you know I am not watching, you must follow or listen. You understand this?"

"I'll have to do it very slyly. If Colonel Nugent finds me out, I won't keep my place a minute, and I rather like it, too."

"We're not paupers, Max," laughed the man. "If you get the grand bounce for playing true to us, you will not lose by it. Watch the woman, and if Father Ferret should come, report at Number Ten."

The boy promised implicit obedience, and as the single late diner rose to leave the table the two passed back into the office.

As they entered the room, Max, the boy, suddenly pressed his companion's hand and threw a quick glance toward the door.

"What is it, Max?"

"The man who just went out, sir!" said the boy.

"Well?"

"He's been going in and out ever since sundown. He walks up to the register, runs his finger down the page, says something to himself, shakes his head and goes out again. Acts like a man a little off. Glory! I guess he is!"

"Where is he?" exclaimed the man from Mendocino, almost dragging the boy to the door.

"Put me onto him, Max. He may be—"

"I guess he's gone," interrupted the boy.

"No! yonder he stands, like he don't know which way to go." And Max's outstretched hand covered a man who stood a few feet away apparently in an undecided mood.

The gentleman from Mendocino stepped forward and fastened his eyes on the man.

All at once a change came over his countenance, and Max saw his eyes flash.

"I guess the paper had it right about the escape!" he muttered almost audibly. "That is the man who felt Captain Bluff's fingers at the Eldorado. He's got a notion in his head that the captain is putting up at one of the hotels. By Jingol I am in luck. The Queen of Bowie Notch and the fugitive within an hour! My course is clear. I follow the man. He is more dangerous just now than the woman from the mountains."

At that moment the man so closely watched started off, and Mendocino said hastily to the boy:

"Keep your optics on the woman. Play the weasel to perfection. There's hundreds in this game for you, Max—if you only play your hand like an old gamester."

"I'll do it!" cried the boy, and he saw the man hasten after the person whom he had eyed like a lynx.

"Hello! Jim Brown from Buttress Bar!" suddenly cried a strange voice, and the man from Mendocino found himself checked by a small man who was overwhelming him with expressions of delight.

"Jim—the devil!" exclaimed Mendocino, trying to disengage himself from the stranger, who seemed considerably under the influence of liquor. "I'm not Jim Brown! You've made a mistake, stranger."

"Mistake? No zircon! Don't I know Jim Brown, the daisy scraph of Buttress Bar? Can't fool old Foxy Fuller with that angelic face o' yours, Jim! How ar' ther pards of Buttress, anyhow? What's become of Wild William, Tornado Thomas, and—"

The man from Mendocino was impatient, mad.

The person he was tracking was fast disappearing, indeed he had just vanished, and here he was being detained by a half-drunken individual who pretended to see in him a person known as Jim Brown of Buttress Bar.

It was annoying.

"I'll see you another time, Foxy," he cried tearing himself loose. "I'm Jim, sure enough, but just now—"

"Jim—old Jim, eh? I knowed it!" and before Mendocino could take a step from the spot, the stranger was at him again. "You don't fear yourself away in this manner! By the buzz wheel of fortune, we'll drink over old times first."

"We'll do nothing of the kind!" cried Mendocino with a flash in his eyes, and his left hand caught the little man's arm. "See here! you don't stop me any longer with the business I have on my hands! Get out of my way, or by the eternal gods! I'll spoil your beauty!"

"You—Jim Brown of Buttress?" vociferated the banger-on as he drew back leaving the Mendocino sport entirely free. "That knocks my faith in human nature higher nor Gilroy's kite."

What have I lived for when Jim Brown goes squarely back on me?"

Mendocino did not wait to reply, but glad to rid himself of the man without resort to violence, darted off after the person on whose trail he was when stopped.

But the detention had completely beaten him. The man was gone!

For some minutes Mendocino looked everywhere, but the trail could not be recovered.

"Confound that idiot from Buttress Bar. I'll go back and spoil his beauty for the rest of his natural life!" grated the indignant sport.

He went back but the man had disappeared.

"Mebbe it was a job," suddenly ejaculated the dangerous sport, as a flash of light seemed to illumine his mind. "Mebbe that man wasn't from Buttress Bar at all."

As he uttered these words, a pair of eyes were twinkling at him from the head of the Buttress sport, but now the little man looked wonderfully like one of our old friends—Father Ferret, the Frisco shadower!

CHAPTER XX.

THE SPOTTER'S GAME.

"You have lost your quarry, thanks to a oxy Fuller from Buttress Bar, ha! ha!" laughed the little man while he eyed the individual from Mendocino. "I'm a little nearer than you think, but you won't get to interview me just now. Ah! are you off again?—taking the back track, eh?" And Father Ferret followed the man who was cursing his ill-luck in forcible English.

Mendocino looked over his shoulder once or twice, but failed to see the man who kept nearly at his heels.

"Pshaw! I don't want you!" suddenly exclaimed the Frisco detective as he whirled on his heel and disappeared down a narrow side street. "The man you were trying to shadow to-night is of more importance, and I think I can find him."

The Mendocino sport was left to pursue his way unshadowed and about half an hour later Father Ferret was rapping at a door on the second floor of a somewhat prominent building.

After a little delay the door was opened and the detective entered without an invitation.

A man rather tall, dark of skin and with a pair of intensely black eyes that seemed never at rest held the door open and looked at him searchingly as he crossed the threshold.

"What do you want?" asked the occupant of the room whose furniture consisted of a table, two chairs and a cot in one corner.

"I want to see you."

"Me?—you?" repeated the tenant in a half bewildered manner as he passed one of his hands across his forehead.

"Yes, sit down," replied Father Ferret gently yet with considerable firmness as he took one of the two chairs himself.

The black-eyed man obeyed.

"I am here to see you, colonel," continued the Frisco spotter. "Do you think you can talk to me?"

"About what?" cried the strange man leaning toward the shadower. "You have not told me who you are?"

"Oh, I am Frederick Fergus," smiled Father Ferret.

The man opposite started violently.

"You are Father Ferret, the California detective?"

"Yes."

"And you want me to talk to you?"

"I do. It is in the interest of law and justice, colonel."

"I don't know if I can help you any to-night. Ever since—"

The speaker checked himself and dropped his eyes. "Were you ever in an insane ward?" he said, and then resumed looking up with a wild glare in his eyes.

"We're not going to talk about that," said Father Ferret. "I want to know a little something about the past—about the history of Claude Stacey before and after the war."

"Claude Stacey is dead, don't you know?" laughed the detective's companion. "He was killed in front of his regiment at Ball's Bluff."

"Oh, yes; we'll admit that; but I want to know something about him all the same."

"From me, Father Ferret?"

"From you."

"Very well, go on."

The Frisco detective moved his chair nearer to his companion and laid one hand gently upon his knee.

"What did you think when you found Captain Bluff's fingers at your throat in the Eldorado more than a month ago?"

"Jupiter Pluvius! I thought I had fallen into Satan's clutches!" grinned the listener.

"Did you tell him who you were?"

"No; he knew—that's why I felt his fingers under my chin."

"Did you meet him accidentally that night?"

"I had been tracking him some time. He came from you a little while before I accosted him. He left you at the Occidental."

Father Ferret bowed.

"That is true. I had just agreed to hunt a certain girl called Sybil."

At mention of the name so familiar to the reader, the man opposite the detective almost sprung from the chair.

"My God! that is the name that haunts me!" he exclaimed. "Sybil! Sybil! He said she was his child, did he?"

The detective nodded, and at the same time he forced the man gently back into the chair.

"Captain Bluff, or Claude Stacey, as he called himself, notwithstanding the fact that he was reported killed at Ball's Bluff, hired me that night to find Sybil, his missing daughter. I have been on the trail ever since, colonel."

"With what result?"

"The girl is still unbound."

A smile came to the colonel's lips at the detective's answer.

"Where have you hunted?" he asked.

"In various places."

"Without finding a clue?"

"Not that bad," remarked Father Ferret, and then his voice got a more significant tone.

"I know that Sybil, or a girl called thus, is alive," he went on. "Up to within a few days she was at Bowie Notch, but she is not there now."

"Ah! they have removed her."

"No; she went away herself—ran off, to put it plainly, colonel."

"Did she come to Frisco?" cried the listener, eagerly.

"I think not. But let me get back to my mission to your quarters. You know that Claude Stacey was not killed at Ball's Bluff."

A strange smile was the answer.

"You know that Captain Bluff choked you into insanity at the Eldorado, because Claude Stacey did not die in that battle."

"That is true."

"Now, Stacey had a child by his Vera Cruz wife."

"Yes."

"He called her Sybil."

"Sybil Ninez Stacey," said the colonel, slowly.

"This child disappeared while her father was in the army."

"That is true."

"Her mother, Claude Stacey's discarded wife, had disappeared some time before."

"And her step-mother, the second wife, killed herself."

"This is no news to me, colonel," replied the detective. "In what way was Sybil Stacey marked?"

"She had a tattoo on her arm—a coiled serpent. Her father had a tattoo on his breast."

"Indelible?"

"Of the kind that goes with its possessor to the grave."

"What became of Claude Stacey after the battle of Ball's Bluff?"

"He went South, and avoided going back into the Confederate Army by secreting himself."

"Why didn't he come to California and rejoin his daughter?"

"He did come, but too late," smiled the colonel, and the next moment his hand closed suddenly on the Frisco detective's arm.

"I've got to stop here!" he exclaimed; "there is a feeling in my head that admonishes me that I must not talk. I am going back into mental darkness again. The surgeon who helped me from the insane ward tells me that I will have spells of insanity for some time to come, but he assures me that all will come about right by and by. When it comes about thus, Father Ferret, I will tell you everything I know. I would now, if I were not told by this pain to stop. You see the strange lock on your door? That is a time bolt. When I feel the spell coming on I am to push it in, and then I will be locked in here for six hours without a visitor. It is strange, isn't it? Come to-morrow, and I will be ready to tell you everything. But you must go now, Father Ferret. I may get violent, and not for the world would I harm the man who wants to find Sybil."

A sudden glare in the man's eye seemed to decide the detective.

Father Ferret left the chair and held out his hand. The strange person seized it with a clasp that was clammy and cold, and the next moment the Californian shadower was at the door.

"I will be here to-morrow," he said.

There was no reply. The man who was holding the door open was looking at him with the glare of a caged hyena about to spring.

All at once Father Ferret leaped into the hall beyond and as he alighted on the floor, the door shut with a bang and he heard a bolt shoot into its place with a sharp click!

"Just in time!" ejaculated the detective. "I don't want to feel that man's hand at my throat, but I am on the right trail all the same."

He listened at the door for a moment, but heard no noise and then went down stairs.

As he was about to pass into the street a slim man with closely-cropped side-whiskers attempted to slip by him.

"One moment!" exclaimed the detective seizing the man's arm. "You are Doctor Bogart?"

"I—that is, sir—"

"I know you, doctor," laughed Father Ferret. "You are going up to your patient, the colonel,

but I can tell you that he has just thrown the bolt."

The slim man started.

"The spell is coming on, then?" he cried. "He's good for six hours to himself."

"After that time, what?"

"He'll be as rational as any man in San Francisco."

"But will it last?"

"I'm afraid not, but he won't have these spells much longer. I'll stake my professional reputation that he won't have a dozen more. I will cure him here. At the hospital I was not certain of success."

"Then you helped him away?"

"I did, sir. I have an interest in that man!" and the doctor's eyes lit up with a proud flash.

"You will excuse me now. If he is secure for six hours, I can go back."

"What does he do when the spell is on?" asked the detective.

"He draws a diagram of some old mines on bits of paper."

The doctor did not see Father Ferret start.

"Did you ever save any of these papers?" he asked eagerly.

"No. Good-night, Mr—"

"Fergus," finished Father Ferret. "Ah! think I have heard of you. Father Ferret, eh?"

"Yes."

The next moment the doctor was gone, and the Frisco spotter looked wistfully up the stair that ascended from his feet.

"I must wait six hours," he said, in audible tones.

"Longer than that," hissed a voice from behind. "If you put your hand toward your revolver, Father Ferret, I will drop you brainless in your boots!"

The detective wheeled and looked.

A cocked revolver was at his head!

CHAPTER XXI.

BACK TO BOWIE NOTCH.

FATHER FERRET saw at a glance that the words of the man who confronted him were not spoken in mere bluster.

The speaker was his superior in physical strength, taller and of a heavier build than he, with resolute black eyes, and a mouth indicative of firmness.

"The bitten has turned on the biter, ha! ha!" laughed the man as he followed his last words with a peculiar smile before the somewhat astonished detective replied. "That little game played awhile ago as Foxy Fuller of Buttress Bar was quite shrewd. It let the man upstairs get away from the person who was on his track; but it won't rid you of me!"

"I see through your mask now," cried Father Ferret. "You have escaped from Jordan."

"Yes—from the young man, Jordan," repeated the detective's confronter. "I wasn't ten feet off when you played the Foxy Fuller role. As for Jordan, I don't think you will trust him on guard any more."

"What have you done?" exclaimed Father Ferret and his eyes got a new light as the words left his lips.

"I have escaped, don't you see?" was the quick and provoking rejoinder. "I humored you by coming to Frisco, but I propose to have full swing while here. *Santa Cristo!* I am somebody when they've stirred me up!"

The peculiar oath was enough to confirm the old shadower's belief in the man's identity.

Pablo the Dark stood once more before him!

Father Ferret's eyes were still looking into the menacing depths of the half-blood's revolver, or over its shining barrel into the eyes of Dom Pablo.

"Come! we will go out," suddenly continued the half Indian. "You will walk with me without an attempt to get away. This is ground which I know very well, Father Ferret. As Diamond Dora's spy I have carried Frisco in my head a long time. We will leave the man upstairs. He has locked himself in during his mad spell. *Cristo!* he would tear a fellow like a tiger if he was disturbed, eh, my hunter?"

"You don't want to go up to the man," said Father Ferret.

"I have no use for him," was the answer. "We can't stay here all night. Ah! off we are now. Remember! I am Pablo, and you the shadower of California."

"I am in the clutches of the man I brought to Frisco under guard," muttered the detective.

"He has eluded Jordan, if he has not finished the young fellow. Why doesn't he go back to Sybil? I hope he will show his new hand soon, so as to give me an opportunity to take the trick."

For the next several minutes the two men walked side by side down the street. Of the hundreds of people who casually noticed them, none saw that they were guard and prisoner, and not one saw the cocked revolver which the half-blood carried slyly at his thigh.

Father Ferret saw that a sudden display of agility, a quick spring would easily give him liberty; but he resolved to go with Pablo and to see him play his advantage out.

The Bowie Notch Queen's spy eyed his prisoner as one hawk eyes another.

"Here we are," he said at last, and the detective saw that he had reached a quiet street with Dom Pablo still at his side.

"I don't come to Frisco often," laughed the half-blood; "but when I do come I know where to go. This is one of my homes, Father Ferret."

The shadower noticed the large frame house in front of which they had stopped, and he thought that the front door was opened just a little while he gazed.

"I shall see this play through if it ends at the gates of Tartarus!" ejaculated Father Ferret. "Dom Pablo is spy no longer. He is working for himself," and then he added through clinched teeth:

"So am I!"

Father Ferret followed his captor up the three steps like a willing prisoner.

The door opened as Pablo reached the landing and the next instant shut again, behind the couple.

Dom Pablo led the Frisco detective into a small room some distance from the entrance.

A lamp burning on a table revealed the scanty furniture and the dark walls.

"Does this look like any house you have ever seen before?" suddenly asked the half-blood, and the next second he was leaning toward the shadower his black eyes aglow.

The Californian threw a hasty yet searching look about the room. He was watched all the time by the woman's spy.

"I know this room!" he exclaimed.

"I thought you would. You came here to search it once before you bargained with Captain Bluff at the Hotel Occidental."

"I did."

"You hammered the walls for a secret panel; you pried up the carpet. Your eyes did not let anything escape. I know why you did all this, Father Ferret."

"Well?"

"You wanted to discover something about Sybil. Claude Stacey and his Mexican wife lived in this house at one time. This room was their private apartment. You knew it, and you came here to sound it long after they had parted. But you found nothing! *Santa Cristo!* but you got mad over your failure."

Father Ferret made no reply.

"Let me show you that you did not look in the right place," continued the half-blood stepping to one of the walls distinctly shown by the lamp. "See! your hammer and your hand missed the secret panel. *Tissima!* here we are, Father Ferret!"

At the same time Dom Pablo struck the wall a smart blow with his hand, and a little door opened just above it.

The Frisco shadower could not keep back a cry.

"Aha! you could not find this!" laughed the spy.

Father Ferret started forward with his eyes riveted upon the opening.

"What has become of the papers? They are not here!" he cried.

"*Santa Cristo!* of course not," was the answer. "They were here when you came for the clue!"

"The deuce they were!"

Dom Pablo bestowed a smile on the detective's chagrin, and then looked into the opening in the wall.

"You knew that there were in existence certain papers that prove Sybil's identity?" he said to Father Ferret.

"I had reason to believe it," was the response.

"These papers were left here when Claude Stacey's Mexican wife left him forever."

"Why didn't she take them along?"

"They were safer here, and she intended to come back after them."

"And she came?"

"Yes."

"Then she has the papers?"

"No; when she came back, they were gone."

The gold-camp ferret recoiled a step.

"When Diamond Dora came back for these strange documents, they were not here," continued Dom Pablo, coolly. "Somebody had been here before her, and it was not her husband, either."

"Then, in Heaven's name, who took them?" exclaimed the Frisco spotter.

Pablo the Dark straightened proudly in the lamp-light, and gave the detective a long look before he spoke again.

"I believe they were abstracted by a woman," he remarked, slowly.

"A woman?"

"Yes, Father Ferret, the very night you came to Bowie Notch, and was confronted by Diamond Dora, a woman died. Do you remember?"

"Great God! that woman was Faro Fan—"

"Your wife! She killed herself because you came to Bowie Notch. I buried her; that is, I took her body to the mountains at Diamond Dora's command. I believe that she, Faro Fan, came here and took away the proofs of Sybil's birth and identity."

"Then, why didn't she—"

The Frisco detective broke his own sentence, and the quick eyes of Pablo the Dark saw his color change.

"If you thought so then, why didn't you look for the papers in Bowie Notch?" he suddenly cried, seizing the half-blood's arm.

"I did not more than half believe it then," was the reply. "I almost know it now, Father Ferret. Ah! you want the papers."

"I do. I am going to get them," and the Frisco detective started impulsively toward the door.

"One word and you shall go," cried Dom Pablo.

"What is it?"

"Promise me that you will not use those papers for a year—even if you find them."

"What manner of man do you think me?" was the quick retort. "Those papers fix Sybil's identity beyond a doubt. She is in your hands now, Dom Pablo, but I want the papers first, now that I know they must be at Bowie Notch. When I have them, I will find the girl. Didn't I tell you the other night that this was the biggest hunt of my life? It is to be the last one. I said that also, I believe. I am going back to Bowie Notch."

"With Jordan? You know you left me with the young man."

"I did, and if you have harmed him in any way, Dom Pablo, I will call you to account. You were ready to come to Frisco to show me the empty pocket in the wall; you had to come here before you could tell me that the woman who killed herself in Bowie Notch took away from this house the papers worth more than money. Don't you know that the prince of schemers and his shadow are in Frisco? I saw the shadow to-night—made him believe I was Foxy Fuller, of Buttress Bar."

"And do you know that she is here also?" grinned the half-blood starting forward with his black eyes dancing. "Where have you been, Father Ferret, that you haven't seen the Queen of Bowie Notch? She came here to find Pablo and the girl Sybil. What would she say if she were to see the prince and his shadow?"

The two men seemed to laugh together, but Dom Pablo was the only one who made any sound.

"If you are bound to go back to Bowie Bar, go!" he cried, ceasing suddenly. "I have escaped from Jordan, but the young man is not hurt. I only clipped the eagle's wings for a spell. Diamond Dora is domiciled at the Hotel Occidental, Room 219, if you wish to call, Father Ferret. Sybil, the prize of the game, is in my hands, but not in Frisco to-night. The secret of her hiding-place is with me, and I would die in my tracks before you, Father Ferret, before I would give it up. Go back to Bowie Notch. You say this is your last trail. *Santa Cristo!* I don't want to see another like it! You are free—free to go back to Bowie Notch or to play some cool hand in Frisco. Take your choice."

Pablo the Dark struck the wall again, and the secret door closed with a slight noise.

"I will probably leave you to report to Diamond Dora," cried the old detective. "Slick as you are, Dom Pablo, you will find people in Frisco more than your match! If you meet one of them the declaration that you are Moralie's son will not save you. You may hold the best hand for a while, but by the eternal powers above the last and winning one will be held by Father Ferret!"

Pablo the Dark sprung toward the old shadower with a cry of resentment, but the door opened and shut in his face, and he halted suddenly, with an oath, to find himself alone.

Father Ferret had vanished.

CHAPTER XXII.

A CLOSE SECRET.

"If Father Ferret takes the back trail to Bowie Notch, what will he find? Nothing! Faro Fan died by her own hand without revealing the hiding-place of the missing proofs, if she knew where they were. *Santa Cristo!* let the California detective go back. Big Burt is there, and Diamond Dora has left orders that will be obeyed to the letter. Father Ferret will put his head into a cage of tigers if he goes back to Bowie Notch."

Dom Pablo, the Dark, uttered these words after the sudden departure of the Frisco shadower from the house to which he had conducted him for the purpose of showing him the empty compartment in the wall.

The spy of Bowie Notch was certain that Father Ferret would not fare well if he returned to the mountain camp held by Big Burt and pard, and he was satisfied to let him go.

"Keen as he is, he can never unearth Sybil!" continued Pablo, with a light chuckle of satisfaction. "Diamond Dora gave the prize of Bowie Notch to me on oath, and I will keep her. The old trailer says that I may run across a man, from whose vengeance the mention that I am Moralie's son, will not save me as it did from Falcon's! That is false! There is no living person who can beat Dom Pablo! They may plot and scheme all they please. The prize remains his! The beauty of Bowie Notch becomes the wife of Dom Pablo the Dark!"

That same night, and not long after Father Ferret's escape, the spy of Bowie Notch was indulging the passion which had almost cost him his life at Bull's Eye.

In a very elegant room which was one of the thousand and one gambling dens of San Francisco, Pablo the Dark, with his deep-set eyes aglow, occupied a prominent place at a table and watched the turns of the cards with an infatuated player's interest.

He seemed to have forgotten the singular drama of which he was an actor.

Sybil the mystery of Bowie Notch had evidently passed from his mind.

He saw nothing, thought of nothing but the game before him.

The few spectators who came up to the table out of curiosity looked at the dark-faced man who took no notice of any one.

Nobody seemed to know Pablo, but his cool playing attracted all.

The only momentary halt in the game was when one of the players rose penniless from the table.

The next second his seat was occupied by a youngish man who had a very dark beard on a dark face.

Pablo looked at him once and then went back to the cards on the table.

The new man looked strangely at the half-blood.

"I've got to break him before he will stir," muttered the new player. "By Jove! this is better than watching the Queen of Bowie Notch. There's a chance here."

The game went on, but from the appearance of the stranger with poor fortune for Queen Dora's spy.

He lost where he had won before; the cards he had bet on no longer increased his pile of chips.

It was a repetition of the card work at Bull's Eye, but here there would be no mob, and no Father Ferret to interfere.

One by one the gamblers dropped out until Pablo and his determined opponent were the main objects of interest.

Lower and lower dropped the half-breed's pile. "*Santa Cristo!* that is all!" he suddenly hissed showing his lost chips across the table, and at the same moment the eyes of the two players met.

There was an inward twinkle in the depths of one man's orbs, the man who had reduced the half-breed's wealth.

"Are you from Bull's Eye?" suddenly whispered Pablo leaning across the table with teeth firmly matched.

"Not by a long shot," was the answer.

"*Cristo!* but you play like one of those demons. You come in on the home stretch. You have fleeced me but fairly, sir, fairly. I don't go back on your playing."

"Can I see you a moment?" asked Pablo's opponent.

"Yes, ten of them if you want it so."

The two men passed into an adjoining room, and shut the door behind them.

A wall jet illuminated the place, which had a little table and two chairs.

"You don't recognize me, Pablo!" exclaimed the half-breed's companion as he grasped Dom Pablo's arm. "I don't want a dollar of your money. I saw no other way of tearing you from the table. Do you know that Queen Dora is in Frisco?"

Dom Pablo smiled.

"I heard that awhile ago," he exclaimed. "But who are you, and why do you want to tell me this? *Santa Cristo!*"

"I am somebody who don't want Diamond Dora to get at you before you know she is about," was the interruption.

"I'm on my guard," answered Dom Pablo. "I don't know you."

"Look at a new face, then!" cried the half-breed's confronter, and the next moment one of his hands went up to his face and the black beard disappeared!

With a cry Dom Pablo went to the wall!

"You? By Jove! the disguise was a good one!" he exclaimed, staring at the man in the middle of the room. *Santissima!* I thought you and your master had found the bottom of Satan's Caldron at the queen's command."

"We went to the edge of the pit, but there we struck a bargain with the men who are Diamond Dora's sworn pard. Bless your soul, Pablo, Bowie Notch is alive with traitors. Captain Burt, of the royal guard, is the biggest one of all. Ha! ha!"

"What did it?" cried the astonished half-breed.

"At the last moment Claude Stacey threw out the secret sign of an order that existed years ago in Southern California. It had hundreds of sworn members, and the oath taken bound them for life. It was the last chance. We stood on the brink of that infernal pit in the heart of one of the Bowie Notch mines. The revolvers of Captain Burt and his gang were at our heads when Claude Stacey gave the sign."

"It saved you?" ejaculated Dom Pablo. "There was a member of the old order in the band?"

"Big Burt himself!" smiled the other.

"*Santa Cristo!* I was thinking so!" said Pablo.

"The old oath was not forgotten," continued Dom Pablo's companion. "Captain Burt offered

to leap into the Caldron in our place, but the men would not hear to that. A bargain was made. Claude Stacey and I agreed to leave Bowie Notch disguised and never to let Diamond Dora know that we were living until we can play a hand which will not get the five pard into trouble. Big Burt went back to the queen and reported, of course, that we had been killed as she had ordered, but we are both in Frisco, Dom Pablo. What do you think of it?"

For a moment the half-breed kept his eyes fastened upon the speaker; then he seemed to glide forward like a forest beast.

"They call you Falcon?" he said.

"Yes."

"Sometimes Claude Stacey's shadow?"

"That is true."

"I am Moralie's son."

"You said so in the suburbs of Bowie Notch when I had my knife at your breast. Where is Moralie?"

"She is dead."

Falcon did not start although the words were spoken in an impressive manner.

"This ought to bind us together," he said, holding out his hand.

Dom Pablo recoiled with his eyes fixed on the hand.

"No! It cannot do it now," he cried. "There was a time when it might have united us, but not now, Falcon. We have the same mother, but our fathers were eternal foes. We are Moralie's sons, but there the matter ends."

Falcon hit his thin lips and gave Dom Pablo a dark look.

"We don't want to be enemies. It must not be so!" he cried. "The same blood is in our veins. You have been Queen Dora's spy; I am Captain Bluff's shadow. This should not turn us against each other. I know, Pablo, that you have lately played a shrewd game for yourself."

"What is that?"

"You have hidden the Mystery of Bowie Notch from all of us—from Father Ferret, from Queen Dora herself, and from Claude Stacey."

Dom Pablo's eyes suddenly got a look of triumph, and his figure seemed to increase in stature.

He said nothing but waited for Falcon to go on.

"You have hidden Sybil," he resumed. "You followed her from Bowie Notch at the Queen's command; you overtook her somewhere, and to-night Sybil is in your keeping. You don't deny this, Pablo?"

Falcon had taken a stride forward and his bent body almost threw his clean-cut, eager face into Dom Pablo's.

There was a certain likeness between the half-brothers, visible now in their glowing eyes and tensely-drawn countenances as they looked at one another.

Pablo almost touched the wall under the burning jet; Falcon was in the full light, with his eyes in a blaze.

"You won't tell me!" he exclaimed. "You want to keep the prize of Bowie Notch to yourself. This play of yours is a game within a game. Claude Stacey wants his child; he is willing to pay for her. Why don't you sell out to him and get money enough to break every faro bank in Frisco?"

A provoking smile came to Dom Pablo's face as the words chased each other from his lips.

"Won't you sell your secret?" Falcon went on. "You have betrayed Queen Dora. She knows that you have Sybil somewhere. Give us the girl for your own price. I can take you to Claude Stacey in ten minutes. He can pay like a prince!"

"Dom Pablo does not sell," and the words seemed to drive Falcon back.

"Not at your own price?" he cried. "The offer will never be repeated."

"*Santa Cristo!* you need not make it again."

"Fool! you run the risk of having Father Ferret, the Frisco shadower, find her! Then you will have no secret to sell, and your empty pocket won't open the door of the lowest faro ranch to you. See here, Pablo, you don't want to carry this game too far. Moralie's son you are, but the name will lose its power. I stand sworn and devoted to Claude Stacey. He will have his child if it costs the blood of all my kin!"

"Let him find her!"

The next moment Falcon went forward again, but the sudden dart of Dom Pablo's hand checked him before the twain collided.

"Not a knife game here!" cried the half-blood looking into Falcon's face but the following moment Falcon was free.

"I came here for the secret," he cried. "You will not sell it for money; you will give it up to keep your soul in its casket!"

He went forward again, but this time with the impetuous bound of a madman!

Dom Pablo received the assault with one foot braced against the wall, and with his dark hands ready for the fray.

The half-brothers came together with a shock, the hands of Diamond Dora's spy closed suddenly, one at each of Falcon's wrists, and Claude Stacey's shadow found himself held as in a vise!

It was the conflict of a second.

"The secret will not depart from Pablo!" hissed the half-blood. "Falcon shall go back to his master empty-handed!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

FOUND BY THE QUEEN.

As the reader knows, the Queen of Bowie Notch had come to San Francisco for the purpose of finding Pablo, her spy, and Sybil.

It was a firm belief with the woman that the half-blood had overtaken the girl, and the time which had intervened since his departure from the mountain gold-camp led her to suspect treason.

Diamond Dora was no stranger in the city, although she had not visited it often since her flight from her husband, Claude Stacey, some years before.

In some respects San Francisco had changed, but the Queen of Bowie thought she still knew it well enough for her purposes.

If Pablo the Dark had come to Frisco there were places which, despite the game he was playing for himself, he would be likely to visit. Queen Dora knew his passion for gambling, and no sooner had she rested fairly from her long ride, at the Hotel Occidental, than she prepared to run Dom Pablo down.

The Bowie Notch Cleopatra was firm of purpose.

"If this traitor escapes me, I will bury myself in the mountains forever," she exclaimed. "The girl is mine—my blood is in her veins. Her father went from my house the other night to the depths of Satan's Caldron. I sent him and his human shadow to death without a show of mercy. Why not? I have now to deal with the California detective if he ever turns up, and Dom Pablo, the meanest dog of the pack."

It was not long after Queen Dora's departure from the hotel when several of the most prominent faro and monte dens of the city had a visitor who did not attract unusual attention.

This person was, to all appearance, a young man of thirty, well-dressed, but unobtrusive, with a fair, soft complexion, deep eyes and easy manners.

He wore a mustache that partly shaded a finely chiseled mouth, and had a good head of hair, dark and slightly inclined to curl.

Let us tell the reader at once that this person was the Queen of Bowie Notch, so well masked that the keen eyes of Dom Pablo would have scrutinized her in vain.

At more than one place she was asked to play, and once or twice she invested a few dollars on the turn of a card, only to lose.

Fortune was against the young man of neat pearance and watchful eyes.

When Falcon, in his disguise, sat down to break Dom Pablo for the interview detailed in the previous chapter, Diamond Dora stood near, with her eyes riveted on her spy.

Falcon's mask was too much for her, and then she was not looking for him after the orders she had spoken to Big Burt in presence of the bronze guard of Bowie Notch.

Dom Pablo had been found, and the queen of the mountain diggings resolved that he should not escape her.

The play at the table possessed but one interest for her.

She wanted to see it end so that her spy would leave the room.

For nearly an hour she had stood at Dom Pablo's elbow.

Now and then a thrill went through her frame.

She wanted to clutch the dark-faced traitor and to tell him that she was on hand.

At last the game broke.

She heard Dom Pablo's curse that announced the loss of his last chips, but then she heard his antagonist's request for an interview.

What did it mean?

Who was this man who, after fleecing her traitor spy, wanted to see him somewhere in private, and on important business?

Diamond Dora felt like stepping between the two men and announcing her prior claim on Dom Pablo, but she restrained herself with an effort and watched them disappear within the little room where we saw them last.

What if a stair led from the room to the street below?

The thought startled the Queen of Bowie Notch.

Dom Pablo would escape, and that must not be.

A question adroitly worded and addressed to the dealer at the table assured her that the room led nowhere.

"I'll have to wait," she murmured. "Having found Dom Pablo, I can afford to wait awhile." And the next moment she was at the table with a pyramid of clean chips before her and apparently deeply immersed in the game.

Five—ten—fifteen minutes passed away.

Diamond Dora seemed to count them all.

She had secured a position at the table from which she could see the door between her and her spy, and she was ready to relinquish it at sight of Dom Pablo.

The door opened at last, and just as Diamond

Dora was scraping toward her a heap of winnings.

Despite her coolness the woman stopped and looked at the men who walked into the gambling room.

Dom Pablo's eyes had a twinkle they did not possess when he left the table, and his companion looked like a man who had lost a game.

The broad stair that led to the room below was at the further end of the apartment, and the elegant bar connected with the house was there also.

Her eyes followed the two men down the room.

The play had no more fascination for her from that hour.

All at once she leaned toward the sleek-looking dealer of the table and caught his eye.

"Can I reach the street sooner than by going down the stairs yonder?" she asked in a whisper.

"Yes, the door behind us leads to a private stairway, but you want to keep on, young man. Fortune is at your feet just now and you want to keep her there."

"I'll risk bringing her down some other time," and the Queen of Bowie pushed back her chair.

"Another game elsewhere, eh?" laughed the dealer.

"Yes," said the woman between her teeth, and in tones that might have betrayed her. "I've got another game on hand, a bigger game than this, too. Good-night!"

A swift glance thrown toward the counter showed her the two men standing side by side while the barkeeper concocted their drinks.

"I have you, Dom Pablo," she cried under her breath. "I did not guess wrongly when I thought I'd find you in Frisco. Your prize is here too, and before morning I will know her whereabouts."

The next moment the woman had opened the door at the dealer's back, and a moment later she was going down a narrow stairway which instinct told her led to the street.

In the doorway below with her figure well shaded, Diamond Dora waited for Dom Pablo, who would be likely to leave the den by the main entrance, which he could not quit without being seen by her.

"Aha! here he is!" exclaimed the watchful woman at last, and at that moment the well-known figure of Dom Pablo appeared on the sidewalk almost within arm's reach.

The eyes that saw him suddenly got a gleam of intense brilliance.

"Ahl you cunning mountain cat!" fell from her lips. "I could drive a dagger between your shoulders. You'd give your life almost to know where I am at this minute. You think me waiting for your report in Bowie Notch. I am not a fool, Dom Pablo! Ah! what is that?"

Queen Dora's last expression was caused by a noise up the stairway.

Somebody was coming down.

To leave the hall would be to throw herself into Dom Pablo's presence, for the half-blood had stopped on the sidewalk, and seemed to be busy with his thoughts.

Dora heard the person above coming down to her, rapidly but with caution.

"It means something!" exclaimed the Queen of Bowie Notch. "I've got to hug the wall where I am, or take to the sidewalk. I'll stay here."

The street lamp at the curb outside threw a light into a part of the hall.

The Bowie Notch woman hugged the shaded wall and held her breath.

She was not compelled to wait long.

Suddenly the person on the stair landed in the hall.

He almost touched the statue-like figure of the gold-camp princess, and his face getting into the lamplight for a moment told her that he was Dom Pablo's last antagonist at play.

"By Jove! have I lost him?" ejaculated the man, as he swept a portion of the sidewalk with a pair of keen eyes. "He got the best of me up-stairs, but I must not lose him if he did. We can't afford to."

The words went through Queen Dora's mind like a knife to the heart.

A wild impulse to throw herself upon the man took sudden possession of her.

"Where is he? Which way did he go?" the man cried again, and then he leaned forward, his sleeve actually touching the Queen of Bowie Notch.

The next moment there was a step on the sidewalk.

"Ahl there he is!" ejaculated the watcher, drawing back. "The secret-holder hasn't escaped me for all. The game of gold and beauty is yet ours, and we will play it through like old hands! Off you are, Dom Pablo. Wait till I slip my soles, and you'll have a cat at your heels!"

A quick look showed Diamond Dora the figure of Dom Pablo as it passed the hallway, and then she saw the man near her lean against the opposite wall and lift one foot.

His body was half in the light of the street-lamp.

"There's one!" he cried, dropping his foot as he drew off the sole of his shoe, and then lifted

the other foot. "Hang this beard! What do I want with it, anyhow, just now? It's continually slipping. Off it is—like the second sole!"

The next second the man stood before Diamond Dora entirely transformed.

He had no beard now, and she saw the clean-cut face and the sparkling eyes of a man she thought dead—Falcon, the Californian's shadow!

For the fraction of a second the Queen of Bowie Notch stood spellbound in the narrow hall.

"Now for the quarry!" ejaculated Falcon.

"Dom Pablo, the city cat is at your heels!"

"Not yet!" cried a voice in the hallway, and the man who heard it found a human being at his throat, and himself forced against the wall.

"I'll kill the city cat and take the trail myself!" flashed Diamond Dora. "I thought you in the depths of Satan's Caldron, but no difference—I'll finish you here!"

"My God! the Queen of Bowie Notch!"

"And the queen wins!"

The next moment the band of the mountain fury rose and fell three times, and then when she sprung back, the figure of a man pitched forward and dropped at the foot of the stairs!

"I have Pablo to myself now!" cried Queen Dora as she left the scene.

CHAPTER XXIV.

RUN DOWN.

DOM PABLO looked back several times to see whether he had anybody on his track, but he did not notice the person who was following him for a purpose.

The Queen of Bowie Notch had no difficulty in finding her dark-skinned spy, and her eyes lit up with flashes of resentment as she watched him.

To keep Dom Pablo in sight and to follow him to Sybil was the scheme uppermost in the woman's mind.

The half-blood seemed in no hurry to accommodate the mountain Jezebel, for he went straight to another faro den and seated himself at one of the tables.

Diamond Dora bit her lip.

She had just seen Falcon fleece Dom Pablo, but here he was at another table, with money enough to secure another start.

The woman stood aloof and watched him.

"I could shoot him from his chair!" she cried.

"The sallow rascal is determined to give me all the trouble he can. He is trying to wear me out."

Pablo the Dark played with his old passion uppermost. He saw nothing but the cards before him; his eyes never wandered to the woman who watched him like a lynx.

The den visited by Dom Pablo was known as one of a private sort, where a quiet game could be had all night if the gamester's patience and money held out, and the half-blood seemed in for an all-night sitting.

An hour passed away, and Diamond Dora's temper wore out.

She lost all interest in the game she was playing a few feet from Dom Pablo; she lost her money, too.

It was nearly midnight when two men entered the faro den and approached Queen Dora's table.

The greeting between the handsome faro-dealer and his visitors was familiar.

"What's the news?" the dealer asked.

"A little blood spilled at Harkaway's," was the answer.

Queen Dora started slightly.

"Blood, eh?" ejaculated the dealer, between the cards.

"A meeting in the private hallway. Rather mysterious, too. The man is unknown, but the person who gave him the knife is not a stranger."

The Queen of Bowie Notch threw a quick glance toward Dom Pablo.

"They're going through the games, the police are," continued the man who had imparted the information. "I guess you haven't got the blood-letter here, major," and he looked over the tables where faro was in full blast.

The next minute the Queen of Bowie Notch had left the play, and one of the two men was touched gently by a hand while he stood at the bar attached to the room.

Wheeling at the touch, he looked down into the face of a supposed handsome young man.

"Excuse me," said Dora. "Did you just come from Harkaway's?"

"I did."

"Did you see the man who was knifed?"

"Yes."

"What is his condition?"

"He hangs between life and death, unconscious. He was cut three times in the breast, and each stroke was meant for his heart."

"Who did it?"

"A dark-faced man sometimes called Pablo."

Diamond Dora almost recoiled.

"It was natural," the man went on. "The wounded man fleeced Pablo at Harkaway's, and he got even with the knife."

"Do you know Pablo, as you call him?"

"No."

The Queen of Bowie Notch drew a breath of relief.

If Dom Pablo was arrested for this crime, when would she find Sybil?

The mental interrogative sent a wild thrill to her heart.

"Are they looking for Pablo?" she asked.

"Yes. They say he plays all night when he gets started, and that being the case, they know where to look for him."

Diamond Dora left the man and looked at the spy of Bowie Notch.

He was still at the table, winning without a break.

Could she get him away?

As she walked nearer a man who had been playing at Dom Pablo's right left the game, and before any one could appropriate his seat the queen of the mountain camp dropped quietly into it.

Dom Pablo glanced at her once but did not penetrate her disguise.

All at once Queen Dora leaned toward her spy and without catching his eye whispered:

"The police want you. They will be here within ten minutes."

She saw Dom Pablo start and look at her.

"You don't want to play here. They are beating the faro banks for you. You'll never get to the end of your other game if you sit at this table. You want to go now!"

The woman saw that her course had won.

Dom Pablo pushed his chips toward the cashier and got up.

"I'll give you the lay-out if you will follow me," continued the Gold-Camp Queen. "No time is to be lost, Pablo."

The man started at mention of his name, but made no reply.

He did not recollect that he had seen this same person the same mustache and the same eyes at Harkaway's, and he went out with his old mistress at his side.

Once on the street below Dom Pablo turned upon Queen Dora.

"What do they want me for?" he exclaimed.

"For attempted murder."

"Santa Cristo! they can't fasten that crime on me!"

"They can do anything in San Francisco," and a smile appeared at Diamond Dora's mouth.

"Let them try it!" cried the half-blood grinding his teeth. "I'll face the police lions, nor run a step from them. Murder, eh? Who am I charged with killing?"

"The man who fleeced you at Harkaway's!"

Dom Pablo laughed.

"By Jove! I'll go back there and seal!" he flashed. "Woo to the person who puts that man's life on the half-blood's hands!"

Diamond Dora caught the man's arm.

What! let him go back and drop into the hands of the police?

It should never be!

"Let me give you the whole game first," she said.

"Who are you, first?" and Dom Pablo looked closely into Queen Dora's face.

"One who does not want you to lose your own game by a foolish step."

"What do you mean?"

"I can't tell you here."

"Where, then?"

"At my hotel, the Occidental."

With a singular cry, Dom Pablo drew back and stared at the person before him.

A sudden revelation seemed to illumine his mind.

The Hotel Occidental!

The Queen of Bowie Notch was there! And he was now requested to accompany this young man to that place!

Was he her agent, her new spy, or—Diamond Dora herself?

All at once the half-blood seemed to dart at the woman like an eagle.

As his face was thrust forward his fingers closed on her arm.

"Ain't you the person who killed Falcon?" he cried. "You want me to go to the Occidental!—For what?"

"Never mind!" exclaimed Queen Dora, firmly. "We will play a masked game no longer, Dom Pablo. We need not transfer the game to the Hotel Occidental. I am Queen of Bowie Notch!"

The half-blood released her arm and dropped back.

"I thought so. I see it now!" he ejaculated. "Why, now that I know you, I'll gladly go to the hotel. You have come to Frisco after me. You are eager to receive the report I have been getting ready for a week. Don't tell me that you did not meet Falcon where somebody found him! I ought to know you, Queen Dora! By Jove! you make a good-looking man!"

The gold-camp Jezebel looked at him amazed.

What had come over Dom Pablo that he was so eager to go with her to the hotel?

Was he really ready to report?

"Come, if you mean it," said Dora. "I don't command you any more, Dom Pablo. I have cut the man who has turned traitor!"

With a derisive smile at his lips for her last words, the spy of the Gold-Camp Queen started forward.

"To the Hotel Occidental!" he exclaimed. "You think I have no report to make, Diamond Dora. I'll give you all you want and more, too!"

Ten minutes later the Bowie Notch Queen and her spy were admitted at the private entrance of the hotel, and the boy whom Falcon had set to watch Dora, saw them ascend the stairs together.

"I am ready now," resumed Diamond Dora, as she turned upon Dom Pablo in a well-appointed room, the key of which her own hand had turned in the lock.

"Where is your report?"

The half-blood threw himself into a chair and for a few moments contemplated the person standing over him.

His cool look was aggravation.

"You gave me the girl on oath," he said at length.

"It is not that which I want to hear!" cried Dora. "I want to know what you did after leaving Bowie Notch."

"I rode after Sybil, of course."

"And found her?"

"Who told you this?"

"You can't hide the truth from me! Dom Pablo, we are here alone. You promised to give me a full report. For it I waited a week at Bowie Notch, and then I took the trail myself. Now, talk!"

"I have found the girl," replied the half-blood coolly. "I overtook her almost before she was out of gun-shot of the camp. She is now where nobody can find her but Dom Pablo the Dark!"

The Queen of Bowie Notch waited for Pablo to proceed, but he kept his lips glued together and looked at her with a leer of triumph.

"Why don't you go on?" she exclaimed.

"You have pledged a full report. Sybil is in your hands. She is my child!"

"She believes it!" smiled Dom Pablo. "But she also believes that she is not Claude Stacey's daughter!"

Diamond Dora sprung back with a wild cry and with distended eyes.

"Who filled the girl with this lie?" she exclaimed.

"I don't know."

"Take me to her!"

"No!" said the half-blood shaking his head.

"You would kill her if I did."

"I believe I would!" cried Diamond Dora.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE QUEEN LOSES.

As she gave expression to the words "I believe I would!" the Queen of Bowie Notch stood before Pablo with white hands clinched, and eyes on fire.

The half-blood looked coolly at her from the depths of the chair he occupied and waited for her to proceed.

"Is this your work, Dom Pablo?" cried Dora. "You tell me that Sybil believes she is not Claude Stacey's daughter, yet say that you don't know who converted her to this belief. Will you swear you did not?"

"I will."

The woman looked perplexed.

"Very well, Dom Pablo! the time is near at hand when there shall be no mystery about this California game. I repeat that I am Sybil's mother and that her father was the Claude Stacey whom I hated so well. Beyond this I say nothing. I will ask you once more to make a full report—to tell me where my child is."

"No," said Dom Pablo resolutely. "You already deem me a traitor. Let me be such in reality."

"Do you mean that?" and Diamond Dora stooped and looked deep into the half-blood's face.

"Yes. I am yours no longer."

Dom Pablo saw the beautiful woman shut her white teeth hard.

"You don't get away from here until I have the full report," was the determined retort and the next second the Queen of Bowie's odd a living barrier between Dom Pablo and the door.

A cynical smile came to the half-blood's lips, and he left the chair as it broadened and gave his dark eyes a mischievous twinkle.

"Can't we compromise, Dora?" he asked mockingly, and then with a single stride he almost covered the distance between him and the mountain queen.

"Yes," cried the woman catching at the words. "I don't want your life, Dom Pablo. In past days you have served me well. I can forgive the unexpected treachery, I will even overlook the breaking of your oath. We should not be enemies."

She wanted to add "you know my power," but something seemed to hold the words back.

"Do you know what Falcon was to me?" asked the half-blood.

"No."

"Listen. Falcon and Dom Pablo had one mother."

Diamond Dora let slip a startling cry.

"But not the same father," continued Dom Pablo with scarcely a pause. "No, we should

not be enemies, as you say, perhaps, but what should I do with the person whose knife found Falcon's vitals at Harkaway's?"

The woman did not speak.

"You tell me that the police of Frisco want me for the mortal wounding of Falcon. He was struck after I left the faro den. I went down one stair he took another. We could not have met. I remember that a person of your dress left by the secret steps. Were the police to come here for the slayer of Falcon which one of us would they take?"

Diamond Dora gave Dom Pablo a mad look for the satanic gleam that danced in his eyes.

"I will not report in full," the half-blood went on. "You know that I overtook Sybil. The prize of Bowie Notch is in my net. Find her if you can, Queen Dora. The traitor, as you call him, holds the hand that wins."

"When do you play it?" exclaimed Dora, clinching her hands again.

"When you force me to."

"Then you play it here!"

The sentence was followed by a sudden movement of the woman's arm, and at the same moment Dom Pablo went forward like a cat.

"I play it then, Queen Dora!" he cried, as his hand caught the mountain fury's wrist, and he was looking into her eyes with a victorious glare while he held away the hand that clutched an elegant six-shooter.

Dom Pablo, lithe and strong, was the superior one of the pair, and the Queen of Bowie Notch found herself in the clutch of a man whose strength she had never tested before.

She drew back as far as she could and looked at him, and for a moment it was glare for glare in the light of the brilliant gas jets overhead.

"You have come to Frisco to play a certain game, while Father Ferret is on his way to Bowie Notch to play one there."

"What takes him thither?"

"A secret inquiry into his dead wife's effects," smiled Dom Pablo.

"She left nothing beyond the confession I took from her hand."

"Father Ferret has gone to see. I sent him."

"Ah! I see!" exclaimed Dora. "You want the Frisco detective to fall into the meshes of Big Burt and his pards! It is a cunning stroke, Pablo—a good one to get the California ferret out of your way."

"I never thought of that."

"But it will do it! Big Burt is my man yet if Falcon and Claude Stacey did escape between my cabin and Satan's Caldron."

"They both escaped," said Pablo cruelly.

"Is Claude Stacey here now?"

"Where Falcon is there will he be."

"I will find him next."

"But you want Sybil first," grinned Dom Pablo.

"I want my child, of course."

"Then don't attempt to follow me!"

Dom Pablo suddenly released the woman, and as she recoiled he reached the door.

"Lift your revolver and never see the child you call your own!" he cried, covering her with his finger. "I am going away to-night. You did not intend to keep the oath you took when you sent me on Sybil's track. I saw deception in the depths of your eyes, Queen Dora. If you can prevent, oath or no oath, Sybil will never be the wife of Dom Pablo the Dark."

"That is truth!" flashed the woman. "I throw her at the feet of no traitor white or dark. Go from San Francisco when you will, Dom Pablo! I lay your hand out if nobody gets one that proves its superior. You think me no match for you. Let time prove what I am."

Dom Pablo turned the key in the lock and opened the door.

"Good-night," he said, with mock courtesy, halting for a moment on the threshold.

Diamond Dora looked at him from the middle of the room, but made no reply with lips.

Her look was enough.

All at once the half-blood stepped out, waved her a parting with his dark, right hand, and disappeared.

"Slipped through my fingers!" ejaculated Dora, as if the vanishing of the half-blood had startled her into life. "Did I watch him for this? Did I leave Falcon cut to the death, to lose the prize in this manner? Gods of mercy! I can't let this devil walk away like a victor!"

The Queen of Bowie Notch went to the door and looked out into the hall.

Dom Pablo was gone, and the sound of his footsteps had died away.

"There must be a way to catch him! He must not carry from Frisco to-night the secret of Sybil's hiding-place. I am in this game to win! If Father Ferret were here, sworn enemy of mine as he is, I would set him on Dom Pablo's trail."

The man so well hunted and cordially hated by the Queen of Bowie Notch, Dom Pablo the Dark, was going down the hotel stair with a peculiar grin on his face.

The man had won, and his thoughts seemed to be with the woman he had left up-stairs, beaten but not undaunted.

"I am wanted by the police," muttered Dom Pablo, as he reached the first floor with the well-lighted office before him. "I have seen the time

when a tussle with the men in blue would not be shunned, but now I don't want to meet them."

He looked through an open door into the office, and his eyes appeared to take in its occupants at the time.

Beyond it was the street, and the half-blood stepped boldly into the glare of the office lights. He made no haste to get beyond its open doors into the night.

He did not fear a check from the woman he had just encountered.

In a moment he was on the pavement, but the next a solid step sounded behind him and a hand dropped with considerable force upon his shoulder.

"I arrest you!" said a voice, as Dom Pablo turned.

The half-blood's eyes grew bright, but he kept his anger down and looked quietly into the face before him.

He was already in the hands of the police!

"You want me, eh?" came over his lips though they did not seem to move.

"We do."

"For what?"

The officer who was Dom Pablo's superior in stature drew him from a little group that had been attracted by the announcement of arrest.

"You are wanted for the affair at Harkaway's," he said, lowering his voice.

"Oh! you've got the wrong man. Santa Cristo! you want to look in the hotel for the right person—room 219."

"We look no further than you, sir. You will go with me quietly. It is a bad job. The man is dead."

"Falcon—dead!" ejaculated the half-blood.

"Dead, sir."

"Dead or alive, I don't go with you!"

An instant later the traitor-spy jerked back in a manner that completely broke the policeman's hold, and before the officer could get another Dom Pablo was out of sight!

The crowd laughed till the officer entirely lost his temper.

"What game was that he gave you about the right person in 219?" asked a little fellow in the group.

"It was a put-up job and nothing else," growled the officer. "Do you think I'm going to disturb a guest of this hotel on the word of an assassin?"

"Don't hardly think you would, but you might run the game down. It won't take a minute."

The policeman reflected for a moment and walked into the hotel.

"Who occupies room 219?" he asked, at the desk.

"A lady from the interior. She came in tonight. Want to see her, sir?"

"No. I knew it was a job!" and the officer came out triumphant.

"Where's that smart Aleck?" he exclaimed, his eyes wandering over the crowd in search of the little man.

"Gone up the flume!" laughed several men.

"I thought so. The person in 219 is a lady, an angel like all o' 'em I'll bet a thousand!"

"You'd lose every dollar if you did, Old Blue Brains!" laughed a small man who walked away from the spot near by. "I'll now go to Bowie Notch to see what that mine will yield me!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

SHADOWED IN BOWIE.

WITH a good horse and to a man who was thoroughly acquainted with the trail, Bowie Notch was not far from San Francisco.

It was not far, therefore, to the plain-looking individual who rode well-mounted from the city and gave his steed the spur when the trail was once found.

"Mebbe the mountain mine won't yield me a great deal, but it's worth looking up," he muttered to himself. "I can afford to leave the queen and her opponents behind me for a spell. Jordan will pay attention to them and see that nothing goes very wrong. The colonel will get over his mad fit at his leisure and let himself out. I believe I was at the threshold of a secret when the spasm came on, but I'll get it before long."

"The policeman told Pablo that Falcon was dead! Jupiter! how the seraph at the Occidental did wield the dagger! I lost some time in bringing Dom Pablo to Frisco, but I've gained some news. I know that my wife, the gold-camp suicide, got possession of the papers bearing on Sybil's identity. If I find them at Bowie Notch I will be armed with irresistible weapons. Great God! I hope I will find them. This hunt is mine. I have said that it shall be the last of my life. After it ends I will be Father Ferret no more."

We will not follow the Frisco detective over the entire trail between city and camp.

Leaping space at once we will set the reader down once more in Bowie Notch, now under control of Big Burt and the stalwart men who constituted Diamond Dora's royal guard.

Father Ferret reached the diggings a short time after sundown, and when the shadows of the numerous little cabins were blended into one.

The door of *La Paradiso*, the saloon of the

camp, stood wide open, and the Californian spotter heard the coarse laughter of men beyond it.

He walked through the shadow of the shanties to one near the end of the unpaved street as if he knew beforehand where it stood.

"This is where the woman ended her life," muttered Father Ferret as he opened the door and walked in.

The little room was dark, and the Frisco detective stood for awhile amid the gloom and listened.

When he drew a match and struck it on the nearest wall, the darkness fled and he saw the simple furniture by which he was surrounded.

"Nothing has been disturbed here since," he ejaculated. "I will go to work now and see how the cabin mine pans out."

The match had found a lamp, and with the one window of the cabin darkened Father Ferret began the search.

He worked like a man who intends to leave no stone unturned to accomplish certain things.

He went through the little cot upon which Diamond Dora found Faro Fan dead, with her confession in her hand, but it yielded nothing.

He then turned his attention to other parts of the room, took up the floor board by board, sounded the walls, climbed to the rafters—in short, looked everywhere.

At last the old detective stood in the center of the cabin nonplused.

"By Jupiter! I must not fail. I did not come here to find nothing," he exclaimed. "I will not believe that Faro Fan destroyed the papers. If she took them from their hiding-place in Frisco it was not to destroy them. My future happiness hangs on them."

The cabin had been searched, but had yielded nothing.

Father Ferret stood like a statue in the lamp-light, his deep-set blue eyes showing the depths of the mystery he had attempted to sound.

"There is another chance," he suddenly cried.

"Dom Pablo told me that at Queen Dora's command he carried Faro Fan to the sepulcher. Where is she?"

He turned to the door as if he intended to rush out and confront the stalwart denizens of Bowie Notch.

"I have to find the dead," he went on. "The cabin yields nothing. The documents are not here. Dom Pablo did not think of them when he carried the woman out. I must find the corpse of my runaway wife. It is the last hope."

Father Ferret blew out the lamp and glided from the cabin, closing the door softly behind him.

As he halted in front of the shanty his quick ears caught the rapid approach of a horse, and a minute afterward he knew that somebody had entered Bowie Notch, from toward Frisco, too.

"Have I been followed?" murmured the detective, leaning forward with a hand on a revolver as the horse came on. "If Dom Pablo or any one else hopes to beat my Bowie Notch game I will know it!"

In a little while Father Ferret caught sight of the horse and his rider.

The animal, well-blown, came slowly up the street, and the shadower tried to recognize the man in the saddle, but in vain.

"Hello!" suddenly rung out a voice, and the horseman pulled up almost directly in front of Father Ferret.

"Who are you?—friend or foe?" and the speaker came forward with quick strides.

"Is it you, Cap'n Burt?" cried the man in the saddle.

"It's no one else. Back from Frisco, eh, Gold Guy? By Jove! I'm glad ter catch you first. How is it thar?"

The horseman laughed.

"Let me never see the infernal place again!" he growled. "I fell into the devil's hands and then into a trap. Jehosaphat! a man who called himself a sport from Mendocino decoyed me into an upper room for a quiet game and then pulled a trap!"

"The deuce he did!"

"Yes, and what is more, Cap'n Burt, the man was Falcon. Why did he do it? He was afraid I'd run across the queen, and that she'd discover what took me to Frisco! The table and chairs that went down into the trap with yours truly saved my life. Thank Heaven! I'm back in Bowie Notch; but she knows all!"

Big Burt of the queen's guard started and uttered an oath.

"Does she know that Claude Stacey and Falcon did not go down into the Caldron?" he cried.

"She knows it all."

"Great Caesar!"

"That's just what I think!" laughed the man in the saddle. "I came here sore in every joint, to put the boys on their guard. If Queen Dora comes back, knowing what she does, you know what will happen."

"But one thing can happen," said Big Burt through his teeth. "She knows that the guard has broken its oath to her."

"That we spared Claude Stacey and Falcon when we had orders to slay."

"It was because Claude and I were 'brothers' before I ever saw the Queen of Bowie Notch. He gave the sign on the brink of death, and I

was bound to obey it. So Dora knows. When will she come?"

"I don't know."

"What is she doing in Frisco?"

"She is looking for Dom Pablo. Her headquarters are at the Hotel Occidental."

"And Claude Stacey?"

"I found him at No. 10 Nevada street."

"What of the shadower?"

"If he is in Frisco, Father Ferret may find Queen Dora. That is our hope. It will keep the woman from Bowie Notch, but we must prepare to meet her, Cap'n Burt. She dealt with one traitor since we became her men."

"Shot him dead in his boots. I saw it all," was the answer. "There must be a secret consultation right away. Go to my shanty and I will get the boys away from *La Paradiso*. We've made a discovery since you went away, Guy."

"What is that?"

"We found the body of Faro Fan."

The man who stood near against the dark door of a cabin could hardly keep back a cry of joy.

"She was never buried," Captain Burt went on. "Somebody—Pablo, probably—carried her into the Pauper's Pocket. Truckee Tony found her body this morning. She looks like she was asleep. Something has preserved her. We are going to plant her to-morrow, and then, Guy, we'll get ready for the queen. Go to the cabin. I'll bring up the boys for the confab."

Big Burt drew back and the man just in from San Francisco moved on.

"This is no chimney!" ejaculated Father Ferret. "Once in a while I stumble on a nugget of this kind. Where is the Pauper's Pocket? Gold Guy knows, and so must I."

Big Burt had already vanished toward the open door of Bowie Notch's saloon, but the blended figure of man and steed was still in sight.

Father Ferret started after the latter.

He saw the man draw up before a certain cabin and slip to the ground.

The horse was left to himself as the rider opened the door and entered.

Beyond the little window close to the narrow portal was the soft light of a miner's shanty-lamp, and a look showed the Frisco shadower the man he had tracked.

The next moment he was at the door himself.

His eyes glittered.

All at once Gold Guy became aware that he was not the only occupant of Big Burt's cabin.

He had thrown himself down upon the cot at one side of the apartment, but at sight of the man who opened the door without warning, he sprang up with an ejaculation of surprise.

"Not a cry!" exclaimed the old shadower, halting in front of Gold Guy, into whose face he thrust a six-shooter.

"I don't want your blood, for you are no enemy of mine. You have just arrived from Frisco, and probably need rest, but I have something for you to do."

"You? why, you are Father Ferret, the Frisco shadower."

"So I am," said the little man, sternly. "I want you to show me to the Pauper's Pocket. You know where it is, and you can guess what I want. Come along, Gold Guy!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE UNBURIED DEAD.

THE man thus suddenly caught by Father Ferret threw an anxious look toward the door, as if he hoped for the opportune arrival of Big Burt and pards from *La Paradiso*, but, as no one came, his countenance dropped and he sullenly submitted.

"So you followed me from Frisco?" he said, tartly.

"No; I beat you to Bowie Notch—you were behind me," was the reply. "I want you to march at the muzzle of my revolver straight to the Pauper's Pocket. Play fair, Gold Guy!"

"Try me and see, Father Ferret. I am not going to give you an excuse for pressing the trigger at my head. If you are ready we will go."

The messenger from San Francisco really did not want Captain Burt to come upon the scene at that moment.

He knew that a meeting between the Frisco shadower and the Bowie Notch pards would result in sharp work, and he had no relish for anything of the kind if he was likely to be a participant.

Nobody interfered with the two men as they marched through the town toward the mountains where the mines were, and the young man did not talk as he saw that Father Ferret was disposed to keep silence.

"The Pauper's Pocket is well named," said Gold Guy at last.

"Why?"

"At first it promised to pan out well, but all at once it gave out or got stubborn, and refused to yield a single nugget. We never go to it, and I don't know what took Truckee Tony there."

"Ah!" exclaimed the detective; "you know what the mine contains?"

"I know only what Cap'n Burt told me," was the answer.

"You were here when Faro Fan died?"

"I was."

"What do you know about her?"

"Almost nothing."

"Did you ever hear of her being the holder of some papers which were highly prized?"

"I believe she had something of the kind."

The detective started and leaned quickly toward his prisoner.

"Go on!" he said.

"Are you after those papers?" suddenly asked Gold Guy, and he almost came to a halt as he looked into the shadower's face.

"Yes!" exclaimed Father Ferret, boldly.

"I'll make it an open secret that I came from Frisco for them."

"Did you search the shanty?"

"I did."

"Then, if they were not there, they can be at only another place."

The detective nodded.

"You know where that is, I see," spoke Gold Guy, with a faint smile.

"If they are not there, what?"

"She destroyed them."

"It will be determined when we search the Pauper's Pocket. Are we near it now?"

"Almost there," and the young man plunged into a narrower trail which a few rods further on brought the couple to the mouth of a ravine.

The opening of the mine was darker than its surroundings, and a quick leap to one side would have lost Gold Guy in an instant to the keen eyes of the California ferret; but the young miner and sport seemed governed by a desire to keep on.

The couple entered, and in a little while were pushing forward under the flame of a torch, which burned above the youth's head.

"So this is the Pauper's Pocket?" ejaculated the detective.

"Not yet. The pocket is a pocket, indeed, as you shall see."

For several minutes the underground tramp was continued, and at last Gold Guy stopped and turned upon Father Ferret with a singular look.

They stood under what appeared to be the roof of a doorway cut out of solid rock.

Beyond the torch was darkness.

"We are here. Do you want to go in?" asked the shadower's guide. "This is the entrance to the Pauper's Pocket."

Father Ferret reached out for the torch, but suddenly withdrew his hand.

"I'll go ahead if you fear," smiled Gold Guy, with an emphasis that did not please.

"Fear—what?" suddenly cried the detective, and the next moment he had snatched the torch away and was across the threshold.

"Heavens!" rung from his throat the next moment. "Captain Burt did not utter a lie when he said the Pauper's Pocket was tenanted!"

The searching eyes of the Bowie Notch sport saw the stiffened figure that lay at the detective's feet.

A resistless curiosity led him forward.

On the floor of the cavern lay the corpse which Dom Pablo the Dark had carried from Bowie Notch some days previous.

Decay had been resisted in some mysterious manner, and Faro Fan, the suicide, looked like a woman in sound and peaceful slumber.

It was marvelous.

The descending light fell softly upon face and figure, and Gold Guy felt a strange and weird thrill pass over him while he looked.

With no perceptible change of countenance, Father Ferret gazed for several moments at the dead.

The woman had been his wife.

He had denied the relation with emphasis on a former occasion in Bowie Notch, but then his life was at stake and the bronze guards of Diamond Dora were the fates that hemmed him in!

All at once he turned upon his companion, and then went up to him at one stride.

"She is here!" he cried in a strange voice. "Step beyond the door if you will, Gold Guy. I want to be alone with the dead."

"I'll do that," was the prompt response.

"Do me the favor not to use your eyes in this direction. I would not only be alone, but unwatched."

The young sport turned his back upon the detective and walked away, while Father Ferret went back to the corpse.

"I have found the treasury, but it may be empty," muttered the shadower stooping over the silent figure. "This is the woman whose one crime made my life unhappy. She knew more than Bowie Notch suspected else she would never have taken the documents from the house in San Francisco. I wouldn't have harmed a hair of her head if I had found her alive, but guilt made her afraid, and she killed herself for fear of vengeance."

For the next few moments the figure of Father Ferret almost touched the body on the cavern floor.

Just beyond the arch that led into the Pauper's Pocket stood Gold Guy waiting for the ending

of the strange search. He might have seen all by a simple act, but he was keeping his word.

As the Frisco shadower rose one of his hands dropped from his breast, and his eyes had a glitter of satisfaction.

"It was no failure!" he exclaimed. "The last place did not disappoint me. I am armed now as I have not been since this hunt for Sybil commenced. Now I can afford to go back to Dom Pablo's trail!"

The young man waiting at the entrance started when the torch-light fell upon his surroundings and the voice of Father Ferret sounded at his side.

"We'll go back now!"

"Did you succeed?" asked Gold Guy, the inquiry springing from his tongue without effort.

"The dead is poorer than she was awhile ago!" was the response. "You can go back to Bowie Notch, and tell Captain Burt that I have been here. You'll do that willingly, won't you?"

"I should not be surprised." And Gold Guy smiled. "Father Ferret, I would like to know—"

He paused and caught the detective's eye.

"Yes, you'd like to know what the woman back yonder gave me!" interrupted the detective. "Look! nothing but this, Gold Guy. A little thing to ride from Frisco for, eh?"

At the same time Father Ferret drew from his bosom a small flat packet incased in oiled silk.

The young sport of Bowie Notch leaned forward with curiosity and eagerness.

"Only that?" he cried, glancing up into the spotter's face.

"Only this," was the half echo. "But this is worth to me more than the wealth of California."

"In gold?"

"No!" and the detective's eyes sparkled.

"What if Queen Dora had found it?"

"Heaven be praised that she did not!" cried Father Ferret. "With this packet I am at last master of the game."

"If the queen does not outwit you!" laughed Gold Guy.

"Let all combine and select the best cards in the deck! I am master still! The man who calls himself Claude Stacey with all his infernal ingenuity cannot win. They say his shadow, Falcon, is dead—killed by your mountain tigress in San Francisco! Dom Pablo's 'hand' is Sybil. I want you to know all this. Tell it in Bowie Notch. Send it to Diamond Dora if you dare communicate with her. Inform Captain Bluff. If I lose what I found to-night, I lose the whole game; if I hold it, I win! Remember! I have sworn to make my last hunt the biggest one of all!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE ESCAPE.

CERTAIN events oblige us to retrace our steps to San Francisco.

Dom Pablo, whose escape from the policeman in front of the Hotel Occidental has been recorded, did not make himself scarce a moment too soon.

If he had not eluded the officer when he did, he would have fallen into the hands of several more who came up too late to help hold the half-blood.

He had a right to believe that Falcon was dead, for the policeman had said so, and while he was not the slayer, he knew enough to avoid the keen eyes that were looking for him.

Pablo the Dark went back to the house with the secret compartment in the wall, where he put on a new disguise which he regarded as impenetrable.

He next went quietly to the stable in the rear of the premises, and saddled the horse which had carried him from Bowie Notch five days before.

"They tracked the half-Indian down, but did not hold him!" laughed Pablo, as he got into the saddle and rode away. "Father Ferret has gone to Bowie to find the papers Faro Fan is supposed to have stolen; Queen Dora is beaten at the Occidental; Falcon is dead; and Captain Bluff hides somewhere in Frisco. This is the lay-out, and I am to leave it all for a spell. Dom Pablo is going to the bird in the mountain cage."

Nobody seemed to watch the half-blood as he rode through the well-lighted streets of the gold-coast city.

His face was turned toward the east, and in a short time San Francisco was left behind.

The mountains were before Pablo the Dark.

In the mean time, a man was pacing a plainly-furnished room, and casting anxious glances toward a door that seemed to open upon the street.

"What keeps the fellow?" he exclaimed. "Falcon said he would be here by a certain time, and it has passed. With the Queen of Bowie in Frisco, and the man I choked at the Eldorado at large again, he cannot afford to make any foolish side-plays now. By Jove! Falcon, if you don't show up presently, I'll go out myself."

The man had scarcely finished when a nervous rapping sounded at the door.

"That's not Falcon!" cried the man, starting forward.

He drew a revolver as he placed his hand at the knob; then he opened the door, and leaned toward the little porch in front.

A boy greeted him, and the next moment he had glided into the house.

"I've word from your pard," said the boy.

"From Falcon? Great Caesar! what is it?"

"He's been struck."

The man recoiled, and let slip an oath.

"When?—where? Who did the work?" he exclaimed.

"A while ago—at Harkaway's—at the foot of the private stair. The police are looking for a fellow called Pablo."

"Jupiter!—the half-blood spy of the Bowie Notch tigress!" was the response. "Are they on the trail?"

And then, before the boy could answer, a hand dropped heavily upon his shoulder and shook him violently.

"How is Falcon, and where is he?" cried the man.

"I left 'im a while ago pretty comfortable."

"Ahl! he lives, then?"

"Yes; but—"

"You don't think he's got much show, hey?"

The boy shook his head.

"Did he send no message? You saw him, you say?"

"He sent you a short note—scrawled it on a bit o' paper, and mighty hard work it was, too."

"Give it to me!"

The youth ran his hand in his bosom and after a little search there produced a piece of paper which the tenant of Number 10 Nevada street snatched eagerly from his hand.

The next moment he stepped back to the lamp on the table and opened the message.

Brief and poorly written it certainly was—a hideous scrawl which plainly told before a word was read a story of disaster.

"Great God!" suddenly exclaimed the man.

"So the police are hunting Dom Pablo? What fools they are!"

"Why?" asked the boy innocently.

"Never mind!" was the reply and the man's eyes returned to the message which read as follows:

"I've been stabbed—three times—by the witch of Bowie Notch. Look out!"

"He was too weak to write much," said the boy.

"What did the doctors say?" exclaimed the man crushing the message in his hand as he leaned toward the messenger.

"I don't think they take much stock in his chances."

"Where do you belong?"

"At the Occidental."

"Oh, you're the spy Falcon put there, eh?"

"I am."

"Has anything happened?"

"Yes. We've got a new guest whom he called the Queen of Bowie Notch."

"Is she there yet?"

"She is. Room 219."

"All right," and the man spoke between his teeth. "You will go back to your post. I'll keep you on duty there if Falcon does get trumped by death. By the eternal gods! they don't win while I live to hold a hand. Wait a moment. Where is Falcon?"

"They took him across the street to a boarding house which he used to patronize."

"Not to the hospital, thank fortune!" ejaculated the man.

When the boy withdrew and left the man alone a change came over his countenance.

"The plan was that we should not meet Diamond Dora in our true characters," he said aloud to himself. "We were not to betray Big Burt who disobeyed her commands on the brink of the Death Caldron. But now she knows that Falcon escaped which is proof enough to her that I had the same luck. I'm going to play a bold hand. She is at the Occidental—room 219. Of course she will not look for me! I'll surprise the beautiful tigress of the gold hills!"

Captain Bluff did not resemble his former self when he left the house, and a rapid walk for some distance brought him to the hotel with which he was familiar.

To go up to Room 219, to burst unexpectedly into it, and to startle the Queen of Bowie Notch was the scheme uppermost in his mind.

The game he was playing had taken a desperate turn.

Sybil was newly missing, Falcon had been assaulted by Queen Dora and the man throttled at the Eldorado was at large!

More than this—Captain Bluff knew the need of quick work.

The Queen of Bowie Notch was in his path.

She had come from the mountain camp to play any hand that promised success; her treatment of Falcon was proof of this.

Captain Bluff entered the Hotel Occidental with all his plans completed.

He knew that Room 219 was on the third floor.

Nobody in the open reception room or office seemed to recognize him.

Men were smoking here and there, or conversing in the easy-chairs along the walls.

Captain Bluff went straight to his work.

He found nobody in the third floor corridors to disturb him.

At length he stopped in front of door 219. It was closed, but a light was burning beyond the transom.

"I'm at the cage; now for the tigress that inhabits it!" laughed the man.

The next minute he rapped, but there was no response. The act was repeated, but with the same result.

"Do I find the cage empty?" he cried, in ill-humor. "By heavens! I will always curse myself if I have come too late!"

The following second he was looking into the room through the transom, and a glance told him that it was not occupied.

"Curse the luck!" he growled, going back. "She may have heard that the police intend to turn on her."

In a little while Captain Bluff was in the office again and one of his bronzed fingers was running up the pages of the register at the desk.

"Too late!" he suddenly ejaculated, almost audibly. "The bill has been settled and the witch is gone."

The plain record of this stared the Californian in the face.

Diamond Dora was no longer a guest of the Hotel Occidental.

"Hades take the woman!" flashed the man, turning away.

"She's gone already," suddenly said a voice at his elbow, and a glance downward showed him the boy, Falcon's little spy. "She paid her score about twenty minutes ago, and went off as she came—on a black horse!"

"The deuce she did!" cried Captain Bluff. "Which way did she ride?"

"I don't know, sir."

The man bit his lips and throw an angry look toward the door.

"I have to do one of two things," he muttered. "I have to play against Pablo and the other Claude Stacey here, or follow that woman by some means and get rid of her. Where is Father Ferret? I consider him still in my employ."

"Somebody is watching us," whispered the boy at this moment.

"Where is he?"

"He has just gone out."

CHAPTER XXIX.

JORDAN.

CAPTAIN BLUFF was at the door in a moment.

"Where is this somebody? Show him to me!" he said to the boy, whom he had almost dragged to the sidewalk.

The boy spy looked searchingly at the people about them, and then shook his head.

"I don't see him; he is gone," he said to Captain Bluff.

"What was he like?"

"He was a young man."

"Tall?"

"Rather tall."

"Black eyes?"

"I think he had, sir."

"Jordan!" said the man to himself.

"While Father Ferret is on the trail somewhere, Jordan watches me. I'd give a good deal to catch him now."

The boy was watching for the man who had lately left the hotel, but his toil was for nothing, for he had vanished as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed him.

Satisfied that Diamond Dora was no longer a guest at the Occidental, Captain Bluff dismissed the boy and walked away.

"In heaven's name, where could Jordan have got to so soon?" he exclaimed.

"I am here, captain."

The answer came with an abruptness that almost took Claude Stacey off his feet.

Jordan, Father Ferret's young associate stood before him with a smile at the corners of his mouth and a twinkle in the depths of his eyes.

Captain Bluff stared like a fool at the young man for a moment.

It was Jordan sure enough; there could be no mistake.

"Ah! you slipped away from me awhile ago!" cried the Californian, grasping Jordan's arm.

"Do you think so?"

"I know it! You were in the hotel a moment ago."

"Yes, I was there."

Father Ferret's friend spoke like a person who has nothing to conceal.

"Where is the old man?" asked Captain Bluff, eagerly.

"Shall I answer here?" was the response.

"No! This is no conversation for the street. We want a quiet place, eh, Jordan?"

The young man bowed, and let the Californian go on.

"By Jupiter! I'm glad I found you, Jordan!" he proceeded. "Next to Father Ferret himself I want you. Do you know that the girl, Sybil, ran away from Bowie Notch? that the tigress of the camp came to Frisco claws and all? that—hades and horns! a thousand things have happened since I saw you last. Come! I know a quiet nook."

Captain Bluff's "quiet nook," when reached, turned out to be a little room over a very plain saloon, not far from the more pretentious hotel.

There were chairs enough for a generous little party, but the captain and his companion only wanted two, and when they had been chosen Claude Stacey leaned toward Jordan, and began:

"Now, my boy, where is Father Ferret?"

"He is gone," was the answer.

"Then he has been here?"

"Yes."

"What has he discovered?"

"Not very much," said Jordan, somewhat cautiously.

"Then I am the better detective!" cried Captain Bluff. "I know that Sybil left Bowie Notch some time ago, that Diamond Dora sent Dom Pablo after her. Does Father Ferret know this?"

"Oh! yes," smiled Jordan. "That news was not hard to get."

"Does Father Ferret know that the Queen of Bowie has been a guest of the Occidental within the last twelve hours?"

"He knows it."

"And that Dom Pablo came to Frisco?"

"Yes."

"Then, if he has discovered all this, why hasn't he some news of the girl?"

"You must let him have things his own way," replied Jordan.

"That was in the bargain, I know; but, hang it all! his own way is getting to be tiresome," ejaculated Captain Bluff. "Why didn't you go off with the Frisco Shadow?"

"I had orders to remain where I am."

"Look here, Jordan, I believe you know exactly where Father Ferret has gone."

"I think I do. He has gone to Bowie Notch."

Captain Bluff was startled by the young man's frankness.

"Why back to Bowie at this stage of the game?" he exclaimed.

"To find some documents."

"To find—thunder!" blurted Captain Bluff. "I have engaged him to find my child Sybil, not a few worthless papers. What is the nature of the papers he went after?"

A singular light came into Jordan's eyes, as if a wished-for moment had arrived.

"Those papers are in some way connected with a young woman," the youth said, watching Captain Bluff narrowly. "They were taken from a certain house in this city and carried to Bowie Notch by Faro Fan, who killed herself in the camp, as you know."

"Yes—yes! that woman is said to have been Father Ferret's wife."

"She was," said Jordan, calmly. "You ought to know something about those papers. They were stolen from the house once occupied by Diamond Dora and her husband, Claude Stacey."

"The—Old Nick! they were!" exclaimed Captain Bluff, starting.

"I thought you knew, as you are Claude Stacey," answered Jordan, with a smile.

Captain Bluff looked like a man who had been struck dumb by an astounding piece of intelligence.

Jordan leaned back in his chair and waited for him to proceed.

"I remember those papers now," said the captain at length, and in a careless manner. "They really amount to nothing, and I don't see why a man like Father Ferret should attach any importance to them. If they were valuable, I would have carried them off when I left the house. They were permitted to lie in an old drawer until this renegade wife of his, Faro Fan, concluded they were of some account and carried 'em off. Father Ferret has gone on a wild-goose hunt, ha, ha! all through my leaving those papers in the old bureau."

Jordan said nothing.

He did not see fit to say that the document had been taken from a secret hole in the wall, and not from an abandoned piece of furniture; but he did see that Captain Bluff talked like a man who, caught in a net, was spinning a hastily-constructed yarn to get out.

"I wouldn't give a pewter spoon for all Father Ferret will find at Bowie Notch!" suddenly continued Captain Bluff, with a laugh. "I don't want any side-plays of this kind. He has promised to restore Sybil to me, and I expect him to do nothing else. When will I see him again?"

"When he comes back, if you remain here," was the reply.

"He was coming back here from the paper hunt?"

"He was unless he got a clew to Sybil's whereabouts."

The man called Claude Stacey was silent for a few moments.

An inward suggestion or a sudden thought seemed to startle him.

"If those papers are valuable in this game, I've missed it," he murmured. "I thought I held all the threads when I came to Frisco, but here may be one which he held back. Faro Fan comes to the city and takes certain papers from the old house on Dupont street. What do they prove, and why didn't I know of their existence? Father Ferret knew, but how?—who told him?"

—the man who lately escaped from the hospital?"

Captain Bluff's face was almost colorless when he once more confronted Jordan.

"Look here!" he exclaimed. "I regard you in my employ as well as Father Ferret, because you are his pupil. Now tell me one thing: Do you know anything about a man who recently escaped from the insane ward of the hospital?"

"I have heard of such a man through the papers, I think."

Captain Bluff's countenance fell.

"In no other way, Jordan, are you sure?" he asked.

"I believe not."

There was nothing about the young man to tell that he was deceiving Claude Stacey. The Californian looked disappointed but satisfied.

"I guess that is all, Jordan," he said abruptly. "When Father Ferret comes back drop me a line through the post. Captain Bolivar Bluff, city. You want to keep your eyes open. Remember that when Sybil is in my arms you and Father Ferret will be bonanza kings. Are you at the Occidental?"

"That is my home for the present."

"Then I know where to find you, Jordan."

The two men parted on the sidewalk, and Jordan watched the Californian until his figure disappeared.

"I see through your game further than ever now, captain," the young man ejaculated. "The bungled lie about the place where the documents were kept gave you away. You may be Captain Bluff, but I'll bet my head that you have no more rights to the name of Claude Stacey than I have! You've failed to get all the cards when you picked up your hand. I see it now!" And with a laugh Jordan turned and walked away.

"Hunt that woman down. Go about it at once. If I am living, fetch her to me; if I am dead kill her on my grave! Will you do this?"

The Californian looked down into Falcon's face, but did not speak.

"I guess I want a little too much, eh?" smiled Falcon.

"Not too much, for I hate that woman as I hate Tartarus. But give me time to find the man from the hospital."

"That won't occupy much time—not over an hour."

"I hope not. After that I will find this mountain tigress."

"Your cast-off wife, captain?"

Captain Bluff hesitated a second.

"Yes, my wife," he answered. "You will be here when I come back, Falcon."

"Dead or alive, I'll be byer. I never prided into your business, cap'n, but there's one thing I'd like to know."

"Well?"

"Who is the man you made insane with your grip at the Eldorado?"

The Californian started.

"A bitter enemy you can bet a thousand!" he exclaimed.

"Of course," said Falcon, "but ain't he more than that, cap'n?"

The eyes of the wounded tough were full of eager curiosity.

"You don't want to tell me, I see," he went on. "Well, I shan't ask any more, cap'n. Go and settle with him if he's in your way, but if he is mad yet, look out for him."

Captain Bluff left with a derisive laugh ringing in the sick-room, and Falcon seemed to listen intently to the sound of his feet on the outside stair.

"Now I'm on my feet once more!" ejaculated the cool schemer. "I will know all about the documents Faro Fan took from the house on Dupont street, and why Father Ferret went to Bowie Notch after them. I can play the rest of the game through without Falcon. The man from the hospital is the greatest stumbling-block."

The information which Falcon had whispered into his ears told Captain Bluff exactly where he would find the man called colonel by Father Ferret on the occasion of a visit already described.

Falcon had made an accidental discovery which he knew was of great value to his master, and but for his encounter with Diamond Dora he might have investigated for himself.

In sending Captain Bluff to the place, he knew he was bringing about an encounter which would result in the death of some one, and he could not be blind to the fact that that one was likely to be the hospital's late insane patient—the man choked by the captain at the Eldorado.

We shall follow the Californian!

Thoroughly familiar with the streets of San Francisco, he knew how to reach his goal by a short cut, and not long after leaving Falcon he found himself in an open hall-way with a dimly discerned stairway rising above him.

The silence of death reigned in the house as far as Captain Bluff knew, and he did not disturb it as he went up the steps on tiptoe eager as his eyes showed to meet some one overhead.

He had the movements of the night prowler and he looked all that he was, a man on a desperate errand.

In the hall at the top of the stairs he stopped and listened for some minutes with his eyes fixed upon a door that could be reached by a single stride.

"Steady now, captain," he said to himself as he advanced again. "This is one of the big plays of the bonanza game. You are to meet for the second time since Ball's Bluff the man of all men who can trump your best hand."

In a moment he was at the door beyond which he could see a faint light burning.

With the deftness of a practiced burglar he took the knob in his hand and tried it firmly.

The trial convinced him that the door was locked.

"I've got to try the usual method," he ejaculated. "Falcon got a good deal of information in a short time. The surgeon's name is Bogart. I don't know what kind of a voice he has, but no difference. The man inside shall not hear my own."

A minute later Captain Bluff bestowed three raps on the door, and then waited for results.

"I've stirred him!" he suddenly cried. "There's only an inch of wood between us now, for he is at the door himself."

"Are you there, colonel?" asked Captain Bluff, leaning forward.

"Who is it?" responded a voice inside.

The desperate Californian started.

"It is he!" he muttered, and then he answered the hail by the man beyond the door.

"It is I—Bogart," he said.

"In a moment!" was the response, and as a bolt shot back and a key turned Captain Bluff straightened and got a demoniac glare.

"There will be no Eldorado business this time!" he said, through his teeth, and just then the door opened and he saw a man between him and the dim light beyond.

"Aha! doctor, walk in!" said a pleasant voice.

Captain Bluff obeyed with suspicious agility, and in a second he stood beside the tenant of the room.

"My God!" rung out a voice as the tenant recoiled from Captain Bluff, and looked at him like a frightened person from a spot a few feet away.

"I thought I was admitting Doctor Bogart, but you—you! Very well! since I have opened my doors to a Satan like you, I will treat you as you deserve!"

The Californian went forward, his eyes riveted upon the man who looked like a person several removes from sanity.

"I want to talk to you," began Captain Bluff.

"No! you want to play your Eldorado game over again. It can't be played here, for I am loose, and the strength of a thousand devils belongs to Claude Stacey!"

Then there was an oath and a spring forward, and Captain Bluff was in his victim's hands!

CHAPTER XXXI.

DOM PABLO'S BIRD.

"SANTA CRISTO! with the city behind me and the prize ahead, what is to keep the half-blood, Moralle's child, from the victory? Forward! the shadow of California is looking for the papers that Faro Fan carried to Bowie Notch. Whether he find them or not, the game will give Dom Pablo its stake when the end comes!"

Of course these words fell from the tongue of the half-blood.

The mountain of the gold rangetowered above his head, and here and there their wooded tops shut out from sight a cluster of stars.

Dom Pablo the Dark was between Bull's Eye and Bowie Notch. He had avoided the scene of his almost lynching by a *detour*, although he burned to ride into the mountain camp and avenge his late misfortune with the revolver.

He curbed his hot desire however with a mental promise that the time should come when he would astonish the denizens of Bull's Eye.

Dom Pablo was one of those people who never forget, and forgiveness was not a part of his Indian nature.

He kept the narrow trail toward Bowie Notch until he reached an unusually poor part of it, when he dismounted, and led his steed on by the bridle. After awhile he left even this sorry road for one still worse, and the gloomy trees and drooping vines hid him from the light of the stars.

It would have taken the keenest tracker to have followed the half-blood by sight, but now and then the horse rolled a rock against its neighbors, causing a slight noise which told that Dom Pablo was pushing on.

The night trail of Queen Dora's outlawed spy ended at last.

When Dom Pablo halted, he stood almost against a wall of solid rock, whose top was lost to view. It was covered with a close net-work of vines, with gigantic leaves, and clusters of green berries that emitted a night-shade odor.

He moved along this wall for a time, or until he found an indentation large enough to conceal himself and horse.

The half-blood led the animal from the trail, and disappeared.

Ten feet from the path he deserted the horse, and found a mantle of rock without the assistance of a match.

The next moment Dom Pablo had drawn himself upon the ledge, and was crawling forward through a rounded corridor as dark as the famous regions of Styx.

"Here is where the eagle sees nothing!" he ejaculated. "The Frisco fox, nor Queen Dora, ever saw this mountain trail. Dom Pablo has not lived without making a nest for the bird he has watched for years!"

The half-blood kept on until the corridor seemed to come to an end.

Then he drew a match along the unseen wall, and with it revealed a chasm that yawned at his feet.

All at once he threw the light away and stooped.

A minute afterward he caught the ledge of the gaping pit with his hands and swung himself over with the agility of an acrobat. This action was followed by a singular noise like that made by a person alighting after a drop; and Dom Pablo drew himself up in a cavern whose walls he could not touch.

"The Indian is home again!" he ejaculated. "He has come back to the mountain cage. Now, what has become of the bird?"

Ten minutes later the half-blood of Bowie Notch entered a circular room, and was suddenly confronted by a young girl who greeted him with a strange exclamation.

Dom Pablo returned it with one of delight but when he sprung forward, the girl, catching his look by the light of the lamp fastened to the wall, recoiled with a half smothered cry of fear.

She was beautiful of face and figure, the latter perfection in its way, and the former stamped with the signet of mountain loveliness.

It was Sybil the waif-mystery of Bowie Notch, the girl whom Diamond Dora called her child,

and the real stake of the game which we have watched fluctuate between San Francisco and the gold camp.

"What news have you?" asked Sybil.

"They are looking for you everywhere!" cried Dom Pablo.

"You have come from Bowie Notch?"

"No, from Frisco." And the half-blood leaned forward to note the effect of his answer.

"What have you found out about me?"

"Not much that I did not know before," was the reply. "Sybil, my mountain bird, you will not get to try your wings for a while."

The girl started, and her look full of eagerness before gave way to one of disappointment.

"You promised me, Dom Pablo," she said, "that I should not be here long. When you went away you said you were going to help solve the mystery of my life. What have you done toward it? Diamond Dora is my mother?"

"Yes."

"But my father?"

The half-Indian showed his teeth in a smile.

"You ought to be content to go no further!" he exclaimed. "Santa Cristo! if I had the blood of that gold hills serpent in my veins, I would not seek to know anything of my father."

"But I do!" cried Sybil. "I want to know whose child I am. You said once that the man who was sent to Satan's Children by the Queen of Bowie Notch was my father, but I do not believe it. I am not his child. Your oath in a Bible would not fix me in that belief, Dom Pablo! What did you discover in San Francisco?"

"I saw her."

"My mother! Ah! she is looking for me, is she?"

The half-blood nodded.

"Where is the man whose coming to Bowie Notch made Faro Fan take her life?"

"Father Ferret, the shadower? He is away on a trail of his own."

"What! has he left the one that leads to me?" cried the girl.

"For a time," smiled Pablo. "He will come back to it by and by. Father Ferret is not the fox who leaves a track while there is any scent left."

Sybil was silent for a little while, but all at once she sprung toward the half-blood and caught his arm as she looked up into his face.

"The time has come for you to tell me all," she continued. "Dom Pablo, when the Queen of Bowie Notch sent you after me, an oath was taken."

The spy started.

"Santa Cristo! How do you know?" he exclaimed.

"Don't ask me—I know!" was the reply. "That oath you forced from Dora's lips before you would take to saddle. I want no falsehoods now. What was that oath?"

The half-blood drew back the length of the girl's arm and looked steadily into her face.

"Yes," he said, slowly, "an oath was taken."

"It was about me, Dom Pablo?" replied Sybil.

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"What is the mountain girl that she cannot guess?" cried the dark-faced fellow. "Where have her eyes been all these past years that she could not see why Dom Pablo should force a promise from the Queen of Bowie Notch?"

Sybil suddenly dropped the half-blood's arm, and recoiled a step.

"My God! I was not told wrong!" she ejaculated. "But, Dom Pablo—you—No! the oath you forced from Dora she had no right to give!"

"Not as your mother, mountain bird?" exclaimed the half-blood, a new gleam in his dark eyes.

"Not even as my mother!" was the answer.

"Santissima! then Dom Pablo will never ask her to keep it."

Sybil darted forward with a cry of sudden joy.

"Ah! I thought there was honor in your heart!" she exclaimed. "There can be no union of your blood and mine, Dom Pablo. The oath given by Diamond Dora you will not try to see fulfilled. The time will come when—"

A sudden look from the half-blood's eyes broke Sybil's sentence and drove her back again.

Dom Pablo followed her up.

"The oath must be kept to the letter, mountain bird," he said, firmly. "Diamond Dora will never be asked to keep it, for when the game is out she will have no power. Dom Pablo made her swear that the child of the mountain, the Princess of Bowie Notch, should become his wife. Santa Cristo! she did not want to take the oath, but Pablo did not move till it had been uttered!"

Sybil heard the dark spy through like a person in the presence of some terror.

Dom Pablo the Dark seemed to laugh inwardly at the effect of his words.

"You are the stake in the big California game," he went on, his eyes getting an intenser fire as he proceeded. "I can tell you that for years you have been hunted high and low by Claude Stacey, that Diamond Dora buried you in Bowie Notch to keep you from him, that he hired Father Ferret and put him on your trail—"

all this and more, my gold hills dove. Do you want it all?"

"No! no!" cried Sybil. "I know all that now, but one thing I want. Why am I worth so much to Claude Stacey?"

"You are the key to mines of untold wealth. He boasts of being able to make you a gold queen, and he can if he plays his big hand out. This Claude Stacey, who came to Bowie Notch with his shadow, Falcon, never gave you a drop of his blood!"

"Thank Heaven for that!" exclaimed Sybil.

"He is the vilest impostor that ever lived!" the half-blood went on.

"But he has deceived Diamond Dora?"

"Yes; she called him her husband when she saw that a certain tattoo was not on his breast."

"But where did he get all his points?"

"In the war between the States—on the battle-fields of Virginia. Hal this Captain Bluff is as cunning as a fox; he has hired Father Ferret to help him through; but he will hold his last cards in a dead hand at the end of the game. He is playing against the best man in California."

"Who is he?" asked Sybil.

"Dom Pablo the Dark!" cried the half-breed, proudly, and his figure straightened as he spoke.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE RUNAWAY ALCALDE.

BOWIE NOTCH was excited as it had not been for some days.

Diamond Dora had come back.

Those who had seen her said that she had visibly changed during her brief absence; that her lips met with more firmness, and that her eyes had caught a new and peculiar glitter.

Rather strange to relate, Big Burt and the royal guard did not greet the queen on her return.

Queen Dora took quiet possession of her old quarters, but soon after her arrival she was joined by a man who came direct from the saloon *La Paradiso*.

The woman sprung eagerly forward at sight of him.

"Where are the traitors?" she exclaimed, clutching the sport's arm.

"Who are they?" asked the man.

"The members of my guard—the men who let Claude Stacey and his shadow, Falcon, escape when on the very brink of Satan's Caldron."

"Oh! they were at the ranch when it was said that you had come back."

"Are they there yet?"

"They slipped away rather slyly, an' afore we knowed it, all was gone."

"Guilty!" grated Dora. "The dogs dare not face me!" and then she looked at the man with a smile.

"What has happened?"

"Not very much, but still suthin' kind o' singular," was the reply. "The man who was Faro Fan's husband came back."

"Father Ferret?" cried Dora.

"Yes."

"What did he do?"

"He hunted up the dead which he found in the Pauper's Pocket, and took from the corpse a packet o' some kind done up in oiled silk."

Diamond Dora uttered a cry of surprise.

"Who told him where the body was?" she asked.

"He forced Gold Guy to show him the place."

"A packet was done up in oiled silk," said the woman, unconsciously repeating the man's words. "Who knew it was there?"

"He did," was the smiling reply. "He came from Frisco on purpose to look for that thing."

The Queen of Bowie Notch looked nonplused.

It was evident that Father Ferret's strange find was a revelation to her.

What did it mean?

The man who had come up from *La Paradiso* waited for her to speak.

"After he found the packet, which way did the detective go?"

"Toward Frisco."

"Must I go back?" she asked herself. "Must I follow this man to wrest his prize from him, to get—nothing, perhaps? Are you certain he went to Frisco?"

"No. He went that way."

"Leave me alone!" suddenly exclaimed the woman. "Go down to *La Paradiso* and tell the proprietor to empty his bottles at my expense. Stay, one moment! You have no news from Dom Pablo, nor Sybil?"

"None."

Diamond Dora waved the sport away, but he stopped at the door as if attracted by her appearance.

"What is it?" asked the Gold-Camp Queen.

"You want to say something."

"Yes. Flash Frank, our old alcalde, was back last night."

Dora seemed to start.

"He sneaked back when he knew I was away!" she ejaculated bitterly.

"He wanted to see you," was the reply.

"He played coward when I needed him! He let Sybil get away when I ordered him to take her off. I have no dealings with traitors."

"But he wanted to see you, said he had a secret which nobody should hear but Queen Dora."

"A chance to get a new hearing—I know the trick!" cried the woman.

"Flash Frank is dying."

Diamond Dora broke into a laugh.

"Come! Tula Tom, you don't play any farces here!" she exclaimed. "Did Flash Frank set you in wait for me?"

Tula Tom retreated from the woman's presence, but was not permitted to get beyond the door for he was quickly followed and caught.

"What is the nature of this secret the tall alcalde holds?" asked Diamond Dora.

"I don't know."

"Where is the man?"

"I can bring him here if you want to see him."

The woman was silent for awhile.

She knew this man well; she was aware that Flash Frank was playing for her hand, and she was inclined to regard the secret as a new card which he had picked up in the desperateness of his case.

"Send him here. I will see him!" suddenly exclaimed the woman, and when Tula Tom was gone she went back with a light laugh.

"It's only a game—a trick!" she said to herself. "The secret he has to sell will amount to nothing. The traitor-alcalde wants back his old place—that is all."

Tula Tom went straight to the crowd in *La Paradiso* and was the central figure of it in a moment.

The queen's order for the drinks was received with boisterous applause, and while the Lords of Bowie Notch were drinking her health, he slipped out on his errand to Flash Frank.

"What kind o' humor did she come back in?" said a voice at his elbow and Tula Tom turned with a start to behold the stalwart figure of Big Burt.

"In a humor that wouldn't suit you, cap'n," he exclaimed.

"What did she call me?"

"Not a Sunday-school name by a long shot."

"I should think not," laughed Burt. "Did you leave her at the Palace?"

"Yes."

"And you are off now—"

"On business for the queen!" And Tula Tom moved away leaving Big Burt standing like a statue in the starlight.

"We've got to come together some time," exclaimed Big Burt looking toward Diamond Dora's cabin. "She is here to punish on sight and I'm the main man she wants. Nothing in the world could have turned me from her commands but the oath I took in Southern California years ago with Claude Stacey for a brother. The sign he threw out on the brink of the Caldron forced me to help him. She wants my blood for that; I know it."

The next minute Big Burt was walking toward Queen Dora's cabin with the mien of a man who had concluded to play a desperate chance.

His countenance got a sterner expression as he moved on, but when he came in sight of the cabin, with its lighted window, he stopped and seemed to recoil from the interview.

He could retrace his steps and leave Bowie Notch without Diamond Dora knowing he had been so near.

"Maybe I'd better not force this meeting," he exclaimed, but despite the promptings of his better nature, he went on.

A few steps brought him to the cabin, and a glance through the window showed him the queen of the camp reclining on the cot against the wall.

"I'm in for it, hot or cold!" laughed Big Burt, and his hand came down on the latch, that clicked as he pressed it.

A moment later he was holding the door open and his eyes had fallen upon the figure on the cot.

"My God! you?" exclaimed the mountain queen, as she sprung up, and Big Burt mechanically stepped back.

"What brought you here—your conscience?" continued Diamond Dora. "Don't you know that you pollute the ground you tread? What made a traitor out of you? You had to spare the life I wanted crushed out! You—the man who bound himself to me with an oath. Get out of my house! I want no traitors here!"

Big Burt smiled ironically, but kept his place.

"Won't you go?" hissed Dora. "I came back here to punish the traitors of Bowie Notch, but when I remember your services of the past I give you grace. The door is at your back, Big Burt. There are other camps for you to inhabit and other women to betray. I have no further use for you. Take all your turncoat pard along."

Her words were accompanied by a look that gave them all the emphasis they needed.

"You won't listen to me, I suppose?"

"Do you want to talk for your treachery?" cried Queen Dora. "I will listen to nothing. There can be no excuse for your work. I am expecting a visitor, and I want to see that person alone."

"See him alone, then!" grated the bronze captain of the gold-camp guard. "There may come a turn in this game when you will wish for Big Burt, traitor as you call him now."

A proud curling of the woman's lip was her only answer, and the big sport gave her a mad responsive look as he turned on his heel and walked out.

"No blood in that little play," he laughed to himself. "I might have seen the tigress's claws if I had pressed the game. So she is waiting for somebody, eh? I'll see who is to recruit a new guard in place of the old one."

Leaving Diamond Dora to smother her rage if she wanted to, Big Burt took up a position from which he could watch the cabin door.

"If I get a grip on anything I can utilize I will hold to it for my own advantage," he muttered. "Queen Dora and Bowie Notch will be ag'in' me from now on. Hello! here comes the man she's waiting for! The old alcalde by all that's holy!"

There was no better known figure in Bowie Notch than the tall alcalde's, and it was natural that Big Burt should recognize it at a glance.

Tula Tom had found Flash Frank, and he was here.

Big Burt watched him with eyes agleam as he approached the cabin, and when the runaway alcalde crossed the threshold and shut the door behind him, a quick figure stepped forward.

Queen Dora uttered a cry when Flash Frank appeared.

"I have admitted you," she said. "You disobeyed me by letting the girl come back to camp. What have you got to make up for this treachery?"

The tall alcalde took a step toward the flashing-eyed woman that looked at him.

"I have found Sybil!" he said. "I can lay my hand on the girl you want!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A GAME LOST.

THE unexpected declaration of Flash Frank, drew an exclamation of astonishment from the Queen of Bowie Notch.

"Do you really know where Sybil is?" she exclaimed, starting toward the alcalde.

"If I did not, would I be here?" was the reply.

"Is this your secret, Flash Frank?"

The alcalde's eyes got a sudden gleam, and the big listener outside leaned toward the little window beside the door and looked in.

He saw Flash Frank lean forward with his hands resting on the table that separated him from Diamond Dora.

"Yes," he went on, in lower tones, "this is my secret. I have found the girl of Bowie Notch, the person who got away from me once at the revolver's muzzle. I can go straight to her."

"Are you certain of this?"

"You dare not try me, Queen Dora!" he exclaimed.

His eyes fairly glistened; he was all eagerness as his manner showed.

"My time has come," muttered the Queen of Bowie Notch. "Fortune has brought this man back to throw the prize of the game into my hands. I will play for the secret he holds; I know what price he expects for it."

"I overlook the past," she continued to the alcalde. "Bowie Notch needs you more than ever. Let this be my pledge—that I take you back."

As she spoke Queen Dora held out her hand and looked Flash Frank in the eye.

The man did not hesitate, but sprung forward with an ejaculation of joy and covered the shapely hand with his unsightly one of bronze.

"You shall see proof of what I say!" he cried. "I am satisfied to know that Diamond Dora of Bowie Notch overlooks my blunder."

The cunning won a smile.

"When shall I have proof?" she asked.

"To-night—now!"

"Good! The sooner the better, Flash Frank. I don't want to hear where Sybil is; I prefer to be taken to her if it is not too far."

Flash Frank drew back.

"I will undertake to bring her to you," he said.

"I hope he'll try it alone!" grated Big Burt, at the window. "If he tries that game, we'll see who gets the best land."

Diamond Dora reflected.

"It shall be as you say," the alcalde went on; "but I prefer to fetch her back."

"You may do it," was the response.

The alcalde drew toward the door with a look of relief.

"When will you go?"

"Right away."

"And return?"

"The end of three hours will see me here."

"Go and bring me Sybil!"

Big Burt had time to step into the deeper shadows of night before Flash Frank came out.

Diamond Dora was alone once more, and with a contentment full of satisfaction.

"The girl has my blood in her veins, and I will teach her to hate the memory of Claude Stacey, her father!" she cried. "I know what Captain Bluff is playing for; but he shall not win. He thinks that the lost mines which were once traced on a piece of paper can be regained through Sybil—his child. She must never fall

into her father's hands. When I have Sybil again I will turn on Claude Stacey, and trust not his end to traitors like Big Burt!"

Meanwhile Flash Frank restored as he thought to the graces of the Gold-Camp Queen, was hastening through the diggings.

And with a big shadower at his heels!

He reached the edge of the camp, where he found a horse tethered to a mountain pine.

"I won the play, King Faro!" he laughed to the steed. "I am going to get back into the smiles of Queen Dora and before long I'll play the hand that looks toward matrimony. Say I'm not in luck, old hoss! A thousand to one that when Sybil comes back to Bowie Notch, I'm promoted two grades at a single jump."

"I'll help you up, Flashy," said a voice at his elbow.

The slim alcalde uttered a cry and wheeled at once.

"Big Burt, by the bones of Josephus!" he exclaimed.

"Big Burt for a thousand!" was the reply, and the next moment the alcalde was looking into the cool face of the captain of the traitor guard.

Flash Frank seemed to stand spell-bound before the man who had appeared so suddenly on the scene.

"We'll go together, Flash Frank," continued Captain Burt. "You need not postpone your trip on my account."

"Go where?" asked the alcalde, assuming an air of mystification.

"To Sybil!"

There was a smile at the corners of Big Burt's mouth as he spoke.

"Sybil—Sybil—"

"No foolishness, Flashy!" came the interruption. "We've been pards a good many years, and you know that Big Burt submits to no nonsense. We are going to Sybil, I say."

With his teeth tightly clinched, Flash Frank drew back, but Big Burt followed him up with the agility of a tiger-cat.

"By the eternal heavens, this is no farce!" cried the captain of the guard, and the next second Flash Frank was looking into the muzzle of a revolver which was held uncomfortably close to his head. "If you want to make Diamond Dora the alcalde's wife some time in the future, you don't want to fool with me. What will you do—show me Sybil, or drop dead in your boots at the outskirts of Bowie Notch?"

"Jupiter! I'm not fixed to put on golden wings," said Flash Frank, smiling grimly.

"Then, you want to play fair with this seraph-maker," returned Big Burt. "I've taken no particular fancy to Sybil, but I think I see something. You've brought Queen Dora's smiles back with the secret of the girl's whereabouts. I don't care how you discover them. You know where she is, and that's enough. Make up your mind, Flashy."

The persuasive power lay in the heavy six-shooter that looked the slim alcalde grimly in the face.

He bit his lip and seemed to surrender.

"Is it a go, Flash Frank?" asked Big Burt.

"You make it one," was the response.

The revolver dropped.

"Now for Sybil!" he said, in low, determined tones.

"Give me a chance—a half a chance!" murmured Flash Frank, glaring through his black brows at Captain Burt, as he walked off under guard. "It takes two men to play a game of find like this."

The services of the horse were not called into requisition for Big Burt had no animal at his command, and a few minutes after Flash Frank's forced decision the men were walking from the spot quite unlike captor and captive.

It was evident from the first that the quick eyes of the slim alcalde were watching his opportunity.

Nothing escaped him.

Bowie Notch and its lighted saloon, where a noisy crowd helped itself at Queen Dora's expense soon disappeared, and the trails of the mountains held the two men.

On, on they went for several miles, or until Big Burt began to lose patience.

"I'm not going to Frisco—Remember!" he said suddenly at Flash Frank's shoulder.

The alcalde made no reply.

"You heard me, eh, Flashy," exclaimed Big Burt.

"I haven't lost my ears," was the grated retort.

"We are going to Sybil, not to the coast. Don't forget this."

"I am going to the girl, you to perdition!" passed between the alcalde's teeth.

Before another minute passed the couple reached a dark part of the almost starless trail.

"My time is byer!" muttered Flash Frank.

"The big cap'n is a fool if he thinks I intend to surrender the secret that is to win Diamond Dora!"

All at once the tall man whirled and dashed at Big Burt with the force of a cyclone.

"Great God!" broke from the big captain's throat. "If this is your play, Flash Frank, it comes to nothing."

Thrown almost off his feet by the resistless as-

sault, Big Burt was hurled back and forced against a wall of stone.

"You go to Tartarus, not to Sybil!" cried the alcalde. "I'm not the fool you think me. I wasn't born in a rabbit's nest, Big Burt."

The captain of the camp guard tried to throw his assailant off, but found it no easy task.

Flash Frank was controlled by a rage that seemed to give him a giant's strength.

"There's a Satan in this slim fellow's frame," muttered Captain Burt. "What if he gets the best of me?"

At that moment the traitor captain was pushed to one side, and Flash Frank stepped back.

"I give you like for like with a little interest, Cap'n Burt!" he cried, and ere the Bowie Notch stalwart could recover, a revolver flashed in his face at a distance of five paces.

The flash and the fall of a man headlong through the mountain bushes seemed simultaneous.

"A man's time always comes if he watches; it never fails!" laughed Flash Frank. "Now, I guess I can go to Sybil unmolested."

He did not go forward to look at the heavy body that had crushed the bushes in its fall, but turned away with the smoking revolver in his hand.

"Don't you ever look at your work?" asked a voice, that seemed to move every bone in his body.

The tall alcalde stopped, and a figure landed at his side.

"Who are you?" cried Flash Frank.

"A person whom you don't want to see just now. I am called, where I am best known, Father Ferret, the Frisco Shadow!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SOMETHING STARTLING.

THE slim Alcalde of Bowie Notch recoiled a step and uttered an exclamation of astonishment, when the man who confronted him announced himself as Father Ferret, the gold-camp shadower.

Where had this man come from that he could appear so suddenly and on the trail that led to Sybil, the prize of the gold-game?

Flash Frank was at first inclined to believe the man an impostor, but when he leaned forward and looked into his face and saw the same eyes he had seen before in Bowie Notch, he no longer doubted.

Big Burt lay near where he had tumbled at the flash of the alcalde's revolver, and the old detective's words had told Flash Frank that the tragedy was known to him.

"What is this man going to do with me?" mentally asked the alcalde. "Is he going to force me to take him to the girl? I think not."

"So you've come back to Bowie, Flash Frank!" suddenly exclaimed Father Ferret with a grin.

"Yes."

"The spell of Diamond Dora's eyes was too much for you, eh?"

The man did not speak.

"Do you think you will ever win the tigress?"

"That is for me to keep!" cried the alcalde.

"Of course. That is not the secret I am after. Keep it to yourself, Frank. Are you certain you made no failure when you drew on Big Burt?"

"I never fail!" came through the sport's teeth, as he threw a quick glance toward the spot where he had seen his victim fall.

"You were in his hands, weren't you? What happened in Bowie Notch awhile ago?"

"Dora came back."

"From Frisco!" cried the detective.

"From Frisco."

"Did she come back to deal with her guard that let Captain Bluff and Falcon escape on the brink of Satan's Caldron?"

"I don't know."

"You don't want to tell very much, I see," laughed Father Ferret. "After your revolver had cracked in the face of Big Burt you said, 'Now I can go to Sybil.' We will go together, Flash Frank."

The returned alcalde could not keep back the cry these words drove to his lips.

"You were listening, were you?" he exclaimed.

"I wasn't far away."

"By heavens! if I had known that—"

"You'd have kept silent, eh, Flash Frank?" interrupted the California shadow. "Big Burt was forcing you to the girl. It is all plain to me, and you need not take the trouble to deny it. Father Ferret is on top just now!"

"You said about the same thing when you took the packet from the corpse of Faro Fan in the Pauper's Pocket!" was the answer. "What does the packet amount to?"

A smile crossed the detective's face.

"Did they tell you about it in the camp, Flash Frank?"

"I heard about it, anyhow."

"The packet is still in my possession. It is the best card in the game."

"What does it prove?"

"A great deal."

"I'll stake a thousand, to be paid in the future, whoever wins, that I can guess its contents."

Father Ferret started and gave the alcalde a peculiar look.

"You?" he cried, leaning forward. "You cannot hoodwink me, Flash Frank. The contents of the packet found on the dead are wholly unknown to you."

The alcalde laughed.

"Let it be so," he said with a wave of his hand, which only interested and mystified Father Ferret more than ever.

"Out with it, then!" cried the Frisco shadower. "You don't know anything. You have discovered nothing that pertains to the secret guarded by the packet. You are playing a game of bluff, Flash Frank, and a poor game of bluff at that!"

"Hang it all, if you want to know, know you shall!" exclaimed the alcalde. "I don't know anything do I, eh?"

"Nothing at all!"

The next moment the runaway alcalde of Bowie was leaning toward the little detective with his deep-set eyes gleaming like two stars.

"There once was a mine king in the Southwest who was said to be richer than Croesus of old," he went on, throwing the words squarely into the detective's face. "This man had a daughter who was to have inherited all his wealth. One day the bonanza king was found dead in his secret office. A few said he was murdered, but there was no investigation. After the death certain men with certain papers came and took the mines. The miner's daughter soon afterward disappeared."

Flash Frank stopped, drew back and looked into his auditor's face.

There was a quiet smile at Father Ferret's lips.

"Isn't all this true?" asked the alcalde.

"As far as you've gone," was the answer.

"You have the mine king dead and his daughter hid away somewhere. What else?"

The detective's look could well be taken for a challenge.

"The daughter had a daughter," Flash Frank went on. "She married a man from whom she afterward separated. The child of this union disappeared very suddenly. She is the heiress of certain mines which are said to have been described on some papers known to belong to the Southwest mine-king during his life."

"Now let me come to the end, Father Ferret, as they call you. Sybil is that child. She is the stake in this game because she is the richest heiress that ever lived. You know this."

For a second the little man with the deep-blue eyes looked quietly into the alcalde's face.

"Is this all you know?" he asked with irritating coolness.

"Isn't it enough?"

"I thought you were going to tell me what is in the packet I took from Faro Fan's body."

"Oh!" cried Flash Frank. "Somehow-or-other Faro Fan who is said to have been your wife got onto the secret, and the packet contains her version of the affair. She may try to clear up the mystery of the mine-king's death, but in the packet she tells you that Sybil is the grandchild of the Southwest bonanza king."

"Then you think that Diamond Dora is the girl's mother?"

"There is no doubt of that!" exclaimed Flash Frank.

"Very well," said the detective. "I won't try to disturb you in your belief."

"What! don't you believe me?" and the alcalde who had straightened after his narrative took a step toward Father Ferret.

"Bless you, no!" laughed the Frisco shadow while his eyes seemed to dance.

"The mine-king had a daughter eh?"

"Yes."

"He possessed diagrams of rich mines somewhere?"

"He did."

"His daughter went away after his death?"

"Yes."

"And married a man called Claude Stacey?"

"No!"

The reply drove Flash Frank back again, and several feet away he stood erect his eyes fastened on the San Francisco man-hunter with a look of amazement.

"If the mine-king's daughter did not become Claude Stacey's wife then Sybil is not Diamond Dora's child!" he exclaimed at last.

"She is not!"

"The papers in the packet tell you this do they? You must remember, Father Ferret, that they were found in the bosom of a woman who used to act almighty strange in Bowie Notch—Faro Fan."

"I never knew her to lie," was the answer.

"Claude Stacey's wife was a Mexican woman. He found her at Vera Cruz."

"The mine-king's wife was Mexican, too," said Flash Frank.

"That is true. But let's put an end to this. You are now going to show me where Sybil is, and when I have found her I will prove to you that she is not the offspring of the tigress who made Bowie Notch famous."

"She believes it though."

"I don't care what she believes!" exclaimed the detective. "There is more in this game than you think. There are two Claude Staceys! Did you know this, Flash Frank?"

"Jerusalem! no!" and the alcalde fell back as if a bomb had been thrown at his feet. "There can't be such a thing as two Claude Staceys."

"Not two true ones," answered Father Ferret.

"Is the one who escaped from the Caldron trap the true Claude Stacey?"

"No!"

"But they say Diamond Dora recognized him," persisted Flash Frank.

"She turned him over to Big Burt and his pards believing him to be her husband. She has—not discovered the truth yet!" and the detective laughed, but could not break the alcalde's soberness.

"This trumps the best hand I've seen!" exclaimed Flash Frank. "But what's become of the right Stacey?"

"He'll turn up, maybe, by-and-by," was the response. "I know what I am talking about, and when you have shown me Sybil you can go back to Bowie Notch and astonish its tigress-queen. Come! Flash Frank, I am anxious to see the girl."

The tall alcalde looked at the agile little man before him, and measured him with his keen eyes.

Big Burt was a giant and he had turned the tables on him. The Frisco detective was a dwarf compared with the captain of the Bowie Notch guard, but Flash Frank saw that for all this he was dealing with no inferior being.

"I guess this little piece of man-hunting humanity has the call on me," he muttered. "If I get a chance between here and Sybil to turn the tables on him that's just what I'll do. Two Claude Staceys, and Sybil not Diamond Dora's child? I don't believe it! By Jupiter! it is a lie out o' a whole piece o' cloth. I've promised to fetch the bonanza girl to her mother in Bowie Notch. See if I don't do it!" and Flash Frank's lips met firmly and his bronzed hands clinched!

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE VOICE IN THE DARK.

"I KNOW what this keen-eyed fellow wants," muttered Father Ferret while he watched the alcalde through his black lashes. "He is watching for a chance to serve me as he served the traitor captain of Queen Dora's guard; but he won't find me asleep. He knows something about the mine-king, but the rest of the story he got wrong." And a smile stole quietly over the little shadower's face.

Flash Frank with his resolutions firmly fixed, was watching his chances as he walked down the mountain path under Father Ferret's eyes.

"Shoot me for a gopher! if I let him see the girl!" he grated. "If I should do it I'll lose Dora forever and I can't afford to let the prize slip through my fingers now. I'm waiting, calmly waiting, Father Ferret. You're slow to give me a chance, but we've not found Sybil yet."

Flash Frank's anger increased as he moved on.

The detective was playing his part with a shrewdness that would baffle the most keen.

"I think we've gone far enough," the little man said at last.

Flash Frank bit his lip and turned abruptly:

"Do you know where she is?" he asked.

"You do, Flash Frank, and you will show me Sybil's hiding-place within five minutes, or I will hunt her without you!"

The meaning of the last words was not hard to guess, and the look by which they were accompanied gave them an emphasis that could not fail to be impressive.

"We're not two hundred yards from Sybil, but the question is, must I take him on?" the tall sport asked himself. "I'd give my chances for angel wings for a second's play. I could get it against the big captain, but against this little devil—not a show!"

"Five minutes, eh?" ejaculated Flash Frank, looking into the detective's eyes.

"Five minutes!" was the stern reply.

"I'm no race-horse, Father Ferret."

"It makes no difference. You will unearth Sybil within five minutes or you will not go back to Bowie Notch with your report."

"I'll see what I kin do," was the response.

The time allotted by the California detective had not transpired when the alcalde stopped and leaned forward with gleaming eyes:

"We're here," he whispered.

"Where?"

"Where Sybil is."

Father Ferret looked at his surroundings, trees, bushes and a wall of stone covered with big-leaved creepers. Overhead the sky was full of stars, and a moon was casting shadows of bush and tree on the wall where it was bare.

He saw nothing like an entrance to a retreat, yet Flash Frank had announced the end of the journey.

The slim alcalde looked curiously at the detective and then threw out his left hand.

"You see now," he cried, pulling a mass of wall-creepers aside and displaying a dark opening of considerable size. "The five minutes haven't expired, Father Ferret, and we are here."

The Frisco detective sprang forward and halted at the threshold of the opening.

"Go in!" he said, with a glance at Flash Frank. "You have matches and you know where the lights are kept in a place like this."

"Pardon me, I don't know anything about this one," exclaimed the alcalde. "I even don't know where the girl is to be found, though I think she is somewhere in yonder."

"You will go forward anyhow," continued the detective. "Remember! there is to be no hesitancy, Flash Frank."

The alcalde said no more, but went forward into the cave, followed closely by Father Ferret, who carried a cocked revolver in his right hand.

The entrance was soon illuminated by the blaze of a match, which revealed the tall figure of the Bowie Notch alcalde, as well as the walls of the narrow corridor that ran ahead.

"Have you ever been here before?" whispered the detective.

"Once."

"When?"

"Last night."

"Well?"

"She was here then."

"You heard her?"

"I saw her, too."

"You will go straight to her now."

"No chance yet," growled the tall alcalde. "I'll try my hand with no chance at all presently. By Jove! Sybil must not fall into this man's hands!"

The corridor was traversed for some distance, with its walls revealed by the bunched matches burning over the detective's head.

Flash Frank saw that he was watched like a hawk; that his slightest movement was observed, and his very thoughts fathomed, as it were.

All at once the alcalde halted, and turned upon the eager little man.

"Did you hear anything?" he asked.

"No. My ears are as keen as yours, I think. What did you hear, Flash Frank?"

"A peculiar noise that came from some point ahead."

Father Ferret listened attentively for several moments.

"There!" ejaculated Flash Frank in a whisper. "There goes the same sound again."

The detective made no reply, but his countenance suddenly changed, telling that he had heard something.

"Sybil," whispered the alcalde, "is, or was, in a room lower than this. I did not go down to her, but I saw her by looking down into it. The noise seems to come from there."

"It was a human voice," remarked the detective.

Flash Frank shook his head.

"You don't seem to think so," continued Father Ferret. "Let us put our ears against the wall and listen."

The two men performed this action at the same moment, and seemed to grow into statues against the stone.

A silence of several minutes' duration followed, and then the two men sprang back from the wall at the same time.

"What now?" cried Flash Frank.

A flash lit up the little detective's eyes.

"Dom Pablo is there!" he said.

"That infernal half-blood!" exclaimed the alcalde.

"Nobody else!" was the quiet response.

"Then you don't get to Sybil without a tussle," was the answer. "There is more tiger in that fellow's blood when you stir it up than in the blood of a dozen of the roughest devils I know."

"I guess he can be tamed," laughed Father Ferret.

"You want to do it by a stolen march, a sudden charge won't do it. He is quicker than a cat."

"We'll see who comes out best," smiled the Frisco Shadow. "If you don't want to go on you can throw down your match and go back, Flash Frank. Where Dom Pablo is I will find Sybil, and I guess I am the half-Indian's equal. You can go back and report to the Queen of Bowie Notch, for you have showed me to the prize I've been hunting."

"And can't I stay if I want to?" and Flash Frank looked down the corridor.

The little detective shook his head in a quiet manner.

"I'd rather play this game myself," he said.

The tall alcalde did not like the answer.

"Stay and fight it out, then," he exclaimed.

"I am going back—maybe to Bowie Notch."

Father Ferret stepped aside to give him room to pass down the corridor.

"I give you fair warning, Father Ferret, that I may play a bad hand against you in the future!" cried Flash Frank, in fierce tones, as he leaned toward the Frisco detective with fire in his eyes. "You've kept me from keeping an important promise to Queen Dora, and I would sooner have kept it than find a new bonanza."

"I didn't know you were so far gone on that Jezebel," smiled the detective. "But never mind, Flash Frank. One of these days I'll put in a good word for you there."

"You?" cried the tall alcalde. "Do you think she would listen to you? Why, she wants your blood, Father Ferret. Give her half a chance

and she'll empty your veins in a second! I don't want you to help me along with the Queen of Bowie Notch. You've given me a back-set to-night, and you should not growl if I get even some time."

The man walked off with a look that seemed to add an additional shade to his bronze face, and Father Ferret found himself alone in the corridor. His improvised torch was nearly burned out and threatened to drop from his hands.

He threw it down with a light ejaculation and covered the spark with his foot.

The corridor was now wrapped in the densest gloom, and in a little while the California shadow was moving forward feeling his way carefully along the wall at his right.

He had the step of the mountain panther and the keen ears of the fox.

"I'm near the object of the long hunt at last!" he ejaculated. "Sybil! Sybil! if you knew who you are you would not remain a moment where you stand. I am no more Captain Bluff's tool than I am Diamond Dora's spy! Where is the half-blood? I heard his voice awhile ago. He said something about winning the game over all the players. I left him in Frisco, but he is here, and the girl is here also. Whose victory is this, if not mine?"

The detective reached the end of the corridor abruptly. He stopped and tried to measure the darkness with his hands, but they could touch no walls.

Suddenly the darkness was cut by a human voice.

"The mountain princess knows that Dom Pablo's game has made her the prize!" Father Ferret heard. "The Frisco Shadow may hunt the missing papers stolen by his dead wife, and the queen can play against Claude Stacey. It will amount to nothing. Moralie's son holds Sybil, the big prize, in his hands."

A laugh ended the sentence, and then came the snap and flash of a match.

Father Ferret almost recoiled with a cry. He was standing within ten feet of the speaker, Dom Pablo the Dark!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

FOUND UNDERGROUND.

THE half-breed did not see the figure of the little detective.

Father Ferret fixed his penetrating eyes on Dom Pablo and seemed about to spring forward and land against him.

If Queen Dora's spy had turned his head he would have seen the man who had found the trail of the waif of Bowie Notch.

As it was, it was lucky for him that he did not discover the little man for discovery would have brought about a terrible collision.

"I can now go back to the other part of the game," suddenly ejaculated the half-breed, and throwing his dying match upon the ground, he walked away through the gloom leaving Father Ferret to listen to his footsteps till they died out.

For several minutes after this the California detective kept his place, and then he moved forward toward the point from which Dom Pablo had come.

There was no reason to doubt that Sybil was near, for the half-breed's words told that he had lately left her.

An almost uncontrollable desire filled the Frisco Shadow's breast.

"I don't know how to meet that girl!" he exclaimed. "She has been the object of my longest and biggest trail. I was hunting her when Captain Bluff came to my room in the Hotel Occidental. He thought I would find her and hand her over to him. I am no fool, Captain Bluff; and besides, when you came to me and called yourself Claude Stacey, I knew you were telling the king of lies. You Claude Stacey? The crime on the Virginia battle-field will not give you the game."

Father Ferret remembered that Flash Frank had told him that Sybil would be found in a room lower than the one he was then in, and he soon reached the end of the cavern.

He struck a match and watched the flame grow above his hand.

"Heavens! who is up there?" exclaimed a voice, that startled the detective.

"It is Sybil!" cried Father Ferret, and then the match showed him the figure of a young girl in a small chamber below the one he occupied.

A circular pit of considerable dimensions lay beneath him, and no steps led down to the floor where the girl stood.

Father Ferret leaped over the perpendicular wall and measured it with his eye.

"I can drop down to her without injury," he said to himself. "Have you a light, girl?"

The person in the pit looked at him for a moment, and then darted away.

She was not gone long, and when she returned she held a lamp in one hand, and looked up at the detective with much eagerness.

Father Ferret climbed over the edge of the wall, and hung along it with his arms stretched to their utmost tension.

All at once he loosened his grip and shot to the bottom of the wall like a cannon-ball.

A slight cry rose from Sybil's throat as he

landed, and the next instant the detective had wheeled and was confronting her.

"The brown dog has gone away!" cried Father Ferret, coming forward. "You are Sybil, or Aida, the girl of Bowie Notch?"

"I am."

A singular spell seemed to hold possession of the detective when he halted before Sybil and met her anxious gaze.

His face lost much of its natural color, and his eyes got a strange, new light.

"Girl," he went on, in a voice that trembled slightly, "who brought you here?"

"Dom Pablo."

"He overtook you the night you ran away from Bowie Notch?"

"He did."

"What has he told you—about your life, I mean?"

Sybil started.

"He said that I am Diamond Dora's child."

"The deuce he did!" ejaculated the detective.

"And you—did you believe him?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because one who is dead told me once that I am not that woman's offspring."

It was Father Ferret's time to manifest astonishment, and he did so by a slight exclamation.

"Go on," he cried, leaning toward Sybil, whose beauty had not suffered by her residence under ground. "A woman who is dead told you something, you say? Who was she?"

"Faro Fan," was the prompt response.

"Great Caesar! did she tell Sybil the truth?" mentally ejaculated the detective as he looked at the girl. "How came Faro Fan to tell you anything?"

"It was by accident," smiled Dom Pablo's prisoner. "She did not intend that I should hear. I entered the cabin one night unperceived. Faro Fan was writing at the table, and now and then she prepared her sentences aloud. I learned enough to know that the Queen of Bowie Notch is not my mother, yet she is Claude Stacey's wife. Still, I have called Dora mother."

"Did Faro Fan say no more?" asked the detective with eagerness.

"Nothing more concerning me," was the reply. "Startled by the terrible revelation I stole from the cabin and left her alone. Afterward I gave Dom Pablo to believe that I believed myself to be Diamond Dora's daughter, for I did not want to get her on my track with that vengeance with which she follows her foes. I told him, however, that I could not believe that Claude Stacey or Captain Bluff was my father. This is all I know."

"Faro Fan did not speak a falsehood," said Father Ferret. "You are not Diamond Dora's child."

"Thank heaven!" cried the girl. "I am glad that the blood of that tigress is not in my veins!"

"So am I."

"But what do you know?" asked Sybil, a moment later. "They say you are the tool of Claude Stacey—that he hired you in Frisco to hunt my down for him. He calls himself my father; he says that I was the fruit of his union with Diamond Dora. She believes honestly that I am her child, and she has guarded me for years like a panther guards her young."

"Did you ever hear her mention one Hidalgo Dick a king of the mines in the Southwest?"

"No, but I heard Faro Fan speak of him, but only once, and then without thinking, it seemed to me."

The detective smiled.

"Why should Captain Bluff hunt me so if I am not his child?" suddenly continued Sybil.

"Ah! you are still ignorant of the depths of the strange game that is being played for you."

"You are in Claude Stacey's employ."

"Not Claude Stacey never engaged me to hunt you. I was doing that on my own account when Captain Bluff met me at the Occidental. Jordan and I were on the trail."

"Jordan?" ejaculated Sybil. "Who is Jordan?"

"A person who takes much interest in you."

"It is all very strange," said the girl, looking into the detective's face. "I am not Diamond Dora's child, Captain Bluff is not my father, yet I am the stake of a great game for gold. Tell me all for I see you know. You detectives find out everything. Why were you looking for me when Captain Bluff came to the hotel to engage you? Did you know my mother—my—"

"My God! yes!" interrupted Father Ferret starting violently, and then he threw out his hands as he continued:

"Don't ask me again to tell you here!" he cried. "It is not the place for a revelation. The proper time for it will come. You must wait until then."

"Am I to wait here?"

"Not for the world! This is one of Dom Pablo's retreats and you must not remain in that half-Indian's power."

"He is going to strike a blow of some kind."

"Against whom?"

"He would not tell me. There is bad blood between him and Queen Dora, blood, too, between the Indian and Captain Bluff whom he

calls Claude Stacey. He may have gone to San Francisco."

"Let him go for the present!" ejaculated Father Ferret. "When he comes back, if he ever does so, he will find his cage empty and the bird gone!"

"At last!" cried Sybil. "There is something about that man that chills me in his presence."

"There ought to be. He has helped more than one soul out of the world. He calls himself Moralie's son sometimes."

"I have heard him."

"Moralie was a New-Mexican woman who first married an Apache chief, and afterward a white man. Falcon is his half-brother, but he always speaks proudly of his Indian blood. But I have said that he should find the cage empty when he came back. So he shall. I have found you at last, Sybil, but the game is not played out yet. There is to be more than one mad play of the cards."

"No bloodshed, I hope," said the girl.

"I don't know," answered the little detective with a shake of the head.

At the very moment that the last words fell from Father Ferret's lips a cabin door in Bowie Notch was opened without noise.

"Back you are at last, Flash Frank!" exclaimed a woman, springing up from a table as the night air touched her. "I thought you would never come. Where—My God! is it you?"

The speaker was Diamond Dora, queen of the gold camp, and the person grinning in the doorway was not the slim alcalde, but Dom Pablo the Dark.

"Ha! my mistress, it is Dom Pablo sure enough," cried the half-Indian. "Santa Cristo! he is glad to find you here. You will get ready for a ride. The horses are before the shanty door."

"A ride?—with you?—whither?" exclaimed the startled woman as she drew back with a pair of excited eyes fixed on the half-blood.

"We are going back to the gold-coast city!" was the answer. "I am going to stand you face to face with your husband. The game winks out in Frisco!" and Dom Pablo glided toward the Queen of Bowie like a jungle snake.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

UNMASKED.

It was forty-eight hours after the events recorded in our last chapter, the finding of Sybil by Father Ferret and Dom Pablo's surprise of Diamond Dora, when a man rather tall, well built and agile, came down the steps of a certain house in San Francisco and walked rapidly away.

It was night in the city.

Everywhere brilliantly-lighted windows allured the pedestrian and the street lamps threw their blaze over all.

The man we have seen was moving forward with a purpose which seemed to depend on his reaching a certain place within a given time.

He looked back covertly every now and then to see whether he was followed, and at length dodged into a narrow hallway and ran up a flight of steps.

"Falcon isn't in a condition to help me with his hands, but he can give me some advice," muttered the man, and the next moment he walked into a darkened room.

Three strides carried him to a bed visible in one corner of the apartment, and he bent over it with a low exclamation:

"It is I, Falcon!" he said. "I'm here on business. By Jupiter! there is going to be some tall playing now!"

There was a movement on the part of a man lying on the bed, and the person who had just come in saw a sunken face and a pair of dark eyes with a gaunt, unnatural glitter.

"I'm glad you've come, cap'n," said Falcon, in a husky voice. "Here I've been lying 'twixt life and death ever since the Queen of Bowie tried to find my heart at Harkaway's. You haven't found her yet, have you, cap'n?"

"Not yet, but the time for vengeance is near at hand."

Falcon started.

"Is she here?" he asked.

"Yes; Diamond Dora is back in Frisco."

"Gods! and why am I here?" exclaimed Falcon, his hands closing madly. "The very thought of that woman being so near gives me the strength of a giant, almost. Where is she, cap'n?"

"I don't know just yet," was the reply; "but I will find her—find her for both of us. You can bet your last thousand on that, Falcon."

"Do it, and I'll bless you with my last breath. Have you found the other one?"

"Sybil?"

"No; the man who escaped from the hospital."

The wounded man's visitor, who was Captain Bluff, as the reader has already guessed, shook his head gloomily.

"I have lost him entirely," he said. "Since the night when I went to him to get some information about the papers Faro Fan carried away from San Francisco, I have not had even a glimpse of him. Jehu! you know I had hardly entered his room when he came straight at

my throat like a blood-sucking vampire, and for a moment I wouldn't have given a cent for my life. He would have killed me then and there if two men, who occupied another part of the house, had not entered the room and torn him loose. I have told you all this before, Falcon."

Falcon nodded assent, with a smile, but his haggard face suddenly grew sober, and one of his hands moved forward to Captain Bluff's wrist.

"If you don't find the tigress-queen soon, I won't hear your report."

"Oh! you're not that far along," laughed the Californian.

"I am! The doctors can't keep me alive by lying. Cap'n, I got the three stabs in your service, but I don't regret it. Bring the woman captive to me, and I will throw my life-chips upon death's counter with a laugh. You can find Sybil afterward. I want to see Diamond Dora here, in this room. I think the game just now is against you."

"It is," answered Captain Bluff, surlily.

"What about the man you once choked into insanity?" continued Falcon.

"What do you want to know?"

"All you have to tell."

Captain Bluff tried to draw his wrist from the hot hand of the wounded sport, but the long fingers grew tighter in their clutch than ever.

"When we became pards, Falcon, one of the agreements was that you were not to question me."

"I know that. You called yourself Claude Stacey, sometimes Major Montooth and Captain Bluff. You told me you were Diamond Dora's husband and Sybil's father, that if you found the girl you could enrich all of us beyond calculation. I believed all this a long time. I have helped you in the hunt. I was in your service when the Queen of Bowie disguised as a young man stabbed me three times in Harkaway's hallway when I was about to follow Dom Pablo."

"Captain, look me squarely in the face. I am going to ask a question which may break the oath I took when I became your pard."

Falcon raised himself and rested his body on his elbow at the edge of the bed.

"This pardship of ours is about ended," he went on. "My part of the game is nearly played out. All the doctors in Frisco can't fix me up for business again. Now, Captain Bluff, by the service I have done you, tell me this: Are you really Claude Stacey who married Dora, the Mexican witch?"

Captain Bluff could not avoid the eyes that held his own in thrall.

"Hang it all!" he said to himself, "the man is dying anyhow. It's only a question of a few hours, so what's the difference?"

Then he leaned toward the breathless and impatient Falcon and said:

"You've hit one of my well-kept secrets, but I'll keep it from you no longer. I am not Claude Stacey!"

Falcon's eyes seemed to get a new light—a strange surprised one at first and then a quick flash.

"Then I've been serving a lie all along," he said bitterly through his teeth.

"You've been serving me."

"And what are you, cap'n, an infernal impostor?"

Captain Bluff flushed.

"You are neither Diamond Dora's husband nor Sybil's father. You have lied from the commencement of the game. You hoodwinked me and then Father Ferret the Frisco detective. You even made the Queen of Bowie Notch believe you were her husband. Did you look like him?"

A smile appeared at the corners of the Californian's mouth.

"It could have been by no other method," Falcon went on. "You were in the Confederate army. Cap'n, you met him there; you got his history from him, and when you came to California you were fortified. Isn't this true?"

"Who's been telling you all this?" cried Captain Bluff looking with astonishment upon the sport on the cot.

"Nobody, but I know it to be true!" was the answer.

Captain Bluff shut his teeth hard and assumed a look of defiance.

"Well, what of it?" he grated. "what if all you say was done?"

"Then, by heaven, I want you to lose the game!" said Falcon.

The Californian jerked back with an oath and sprung erect.

"You forget the big stakes of the play," he exclaimed. "I could not expect to win without Sybil, and then only as her acknowledged father. I had to find her first. Claude Stacey left home when a boy. His father, who was growing rich at the time, cut him off, but afterward, just before he died, he made the missing son his heir on condition that he gave the whole estate at once to his children. I was Claude Stacey's comrade in the Confederate Army. I got his history from him piece by piece till I had it all. I looked like him then—so much so that we were accounted brothers. I thought he had

been killed at Ball's Bluff. I had a right to think so," and Captain Bluff smiled.

"Claude Stacey knew nothing about his father's death, I learned it by the merest accident. Fortune seemed to be playing into my hands then. When I came back to California after the war I found Sybil missing, the Mexican wife gone, and the game of no account without the girl. Falcon, we've been playing for millions; more money than you can count. If I could find the diagram Claude Stacey used to own it would add to the stakes. It consisted of a piece of paper that once belonged to Hidalgo Dick the miner-king of the Southwest."

"I know about him!" exclaimed Falcon. "He willed his diagram to his daughter and her heirs. How did it fall into Claude Stacey's hands?"

"I don't know, but he had it once and lost it about the time he lost his wife. We can do without it if we can get hold of Sybil. I will continue to play Claude Stacey."

"You can't play the role to perfection, cap'n, until you have found the patient from the hospital," said Falcon with a slight smile.

"I will find him!" exclaimed Captain Bluff. "You know now why I choked him at the Eldorado."

"Yes; that is not hard to guess."

Captain Bluff gave utterance to a low vengeful laugh as he came toward the couch and leaned over the man who steadfastly regarded him.

"I'll fight it out alone, Falcon," he went on. "They have driven me to a corner, and now by heavens! the pack will see some fun!"

"Where is Father Ferret?"

"I don't know, and I don't care! The Frisco Shadow has been playing double all along. This man, Jordan, has been at my heels within the last ten hours. Give me half a chance, and I'll turn like a thug on the young man. I came here to ask some advice of you, Falcon, but I won't do it. I'm going to prove a match for the whole set. Good-by till we meet again!"

Captain Bluff drew back and turned toward the door.

"Go ahead!" cried Falcon from his cot. "You swore me to serve a lie—it got me a dagger in my breast, and I hope your bonanza will turn to blood," and as the door opened and shut on Captain Bluff, Falcon fell back exhausted.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE BOTTOM OF THE MYSTERY.

"JORDAN, my boy, what have you discovered?"

Father Ferret, seated in an arm-chair in his old room—Number 98—in the Hotel Occidental, looked with a smile into the face of the young man who had just come in.

It was Jordan, his young friend—Jordan, the detective's shadow, as some called him.

"The Queen of Bowie is back again," was the reply.

"Is that all, Jordan?"

"Captain Bluff has been to see her victim, Falcon."

Father Ferret smiled.

"How is he?"

"The man is dying."

"Captain Bluff could not stay?"

"No."

"He evidently knows that the game has turned against him. Do you know whether we can put our fingers on the patient from the hospital?"

"Must we find him?" asked Jordan, eagerly.

"It is best that we should."

"Then he shall be found!"

"Now," continued the old detective, rising, "we go to work with the last hand. Come, Jordan; the girl is asleep. We won't disturb her. She knows nothing as yet, but I am certain; I cannot be mistaken."

"About what?"

"Never mind, boy."

The young man gave Father Ferret an inquisitive look and followed him from the room.

"You are right, Jordan," he said in the corridor. "Diamond Dora is in Frisco. She did not come alone nor of her own free will. Dom Pablo brought her."

"Dom Pablo?" exclaimed the youth.

"Yes; the queen came here in the clutches of her spy. Dom Pablo thinks he has the game in his own hands; the girl is safe in the cave, he thinks, and he has forced Dora to Frisco to confront the man she calls her husband—Captain Bluff, the deep plotter for the biggest bonanza out of doors."

"We don't want the Bowie Notch Queen to find her daughter," said Jordan.

Father Ferret started and gave the youth a strange smile, but made no answer.

"We will find the colonel first," he resumed on the floor below. "I must see the man who escaped from the hospital some time ago."

"How will you find him?"

"Through his doctor," was the quick reply.

A few moments later Father Ferret had obtained the number of the city residence of Doctor Bogart of the hospital, and not long afterward he confronted the physician in person.

The doctor started at sight of him.

"Don't you ever leave a trail?" he asked.

"Never before the end is reached," smiled the detective. "Where is he?"

The doctor hesitated for a moment, and then as if the deep blue eyes of the city shadower told him that he would listen to no equivocation, he answered:

"The man is here."

"All right?"

"Yes; the last spasm is his last. "Why, his name is Claude Stacey."

Father Ferret laughed.

"It is nothing else!" he exclaimed. "I want to see this man."

In a little while the detective entered a room on the second floor of the doctor's residence, and surprised a man who started visibly at sight of him.

"I know what you want to know!" cried the patient. "I am safe at last. Claude Stacey stands before you, Father Ferret. The other man is a living lie!"

The eyes of the speaker glowed as he pronounced the words; he stood erect before the little detective, handsome but pale, and somewhat haggard of countenance.

"What have you discovered?" he went on. "I don't want to know anything about Captain Bluff. I will run him down when I want him. But what about my tigress wife and my child?"

Father Ferret took a chair and waved the speaker calmly to another.

"The crisis has come," he said.

"I am glad of that."

"I came here not to ask you about your Virginia campaigns, nor about your double, now called captain Bluff. I am going to speak about Sybil."

"Ah! my child Sybil. You have found her?"

Father Ferret made no reply for a moment.

"I have found a girl," he said, "but she may not be Sybil. Indeed, I suspect she is not."

"And you, Father Ferret, the great detective?"

"Yes; but listen to me. Your daughter Sybil had a tattoo on her arm?"

"She had."

"What was it?"

"A coiled serpent."

"With a triad just over its head?"

"No."

"You are certain there was no triad?"

"I am. I stood by when the tattoo was made."

"Then," said Father Ferret, leaning forward and touching the man's wrist softly with his finger, "then the Sybil who has been found is not your child."

"Claude Stacey started violently.

"She must be mine!" he exclaimed. "There cannot be two people with the same tattoo. Where is this girl?"

"Don't get excited or unstrung," said Father Ferret, looking up at the man in the middle of the floor. "I came here to verify a belief of my own. I am satisfied."

"Satisfied of what?"

"That the Sybil guarded so well by Queen Dora of Bowie Notch is not her child."

"Nor mine?"

"Nor yours, Claude Stacey."

"Then in God's name, whose child is she?"

"Mine!"

The figure of the detective seemed to increase an inch in stature as he spoke.

Claude Stacey was almost taken off his feet by the announcement.

"Your child? I did not know that you had a lost child," he cried, leaning toward the Frisco shadower.

"Here! look at these papers," answered Father Ferret, taking a packet done up in oiled silk from his bosom.

"Where did you get them?" asked Stacey.

"From the dead."

"From what dead?"

"My wife, Faro Fan, the daughter of Hidalgo Dick, the miner-king of the Southwest!"

Claude Stacey refused the papers and went back across the room with a wild cry.

"My God! has this been your trail?" he exclaimed as he stared wildly at the little detective, whose eyes fairly snapped with victory.

"It has been the great trail of my life!" he cried. "They tell me that the diagram of the great bonanza of the Southwest was not found among the papers of Hidalgo Dick after his death, but that a paper of similar import afterward belonged to you. I am the husband of the miner-king's daughter, who afterward left me and became Faro Fan. She died in Bowie Notch by her own hand the night I went there, fearing that I had run her down for vengeance. Our child, a little girl when we parted, she took along. I had tattooed her arm when a babe with the design of a coiled serpent, and my wife says in the papers I have brought you that she afterward added a triad over the snake's head! So you see, Claude Stacey, that the Sybil we have both been looking for is my child and not yours!"

"Then where is mine?" flashed the detective's auditor, springing forward. "Be careful, Father Ferret! You don't want to rob me at this stage of the game!"

"I rob nobody. I only take my own," replied the little man. "Claude Stacey, you are not much better than your infamous double. He has played a deep game, thinking that Sybil

was your child. He has played for the fortune your father left you on the condition that you would give it all to your offspring. It was for this that he choked you almost to death at the Eldorado—"

"And shot me in Virginia!" cried Claude Stacey. "Do you know where I will find this man? You dare not tell me where he lives, Father Ferret."

A smile passed over the city ferret's face.

"If you go to No. 10 Nevada street—"

"I go! They tore me from him some time ago, but this time I will play the game out!"

"Will you report to me afterward?"

"Why should I?"

"You will be wanted for the killing of Hidalgo Dick, in his underground mine, years ago. You wanted the diagram of the new bonanza. You always thought that your wife, Diamond Dora, carried off your papers from the secret pocket in the wall of the house on Dupont street. They fell into the hands of Faro Fan. They are in my possession now."

"The diagram, too?"

"The diagram!"

Claude Stacey threw a swift look toward the door behind the detective.

Father Ferret stepped aside.

"You were the cause of Hidalgo Dick's death, and you know it," he continued. "At No. 10 Nevada street you may find your double and enemy, Captain Bluff. But remember this: Sybil is not your child. She is Ninez Fergus, and my blood is in her veins!"

"Let it be so. Where is my tigress-wife?"

"Nearer than you think," smiled the detective.

"My double first, the viper afterward!"

A man passed Father Ferret with a bound, the door opened and closed, and the detective was alone."

"A new revelation would have surprised him if he had read these papers," murmured the little man, replacing the packet in his bosom. "I can now go and tell the other two, Dom Pablo and his queen, that the game is played out, and the mystery cleared."

Ten minutes later Father Ferret felt a hand encircle his arm on the street.

"Jordan!" he exclaimed, confronting the person who stopped him. "You are as white as a shroud. In Heaven's name, what have you seen?"

"Enough to keep me white for a week!"

"What has happened?"

"Falcon is dead, but he is not alone. Come and see!" and the young man started off, followed closely by the little detective, whose blue eyes were dilated with wonder.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

RING DOWN THE CURTAIN.

A HASTY walk of five minutes' duration brought Father Ferret and Jordan to a house nearly opposite Harkaway's faro rooms.

There was no stir about the place to indicate that anything unusual had transpired beyond the door.

Across the way the windows of the faro-bank had streaks of brilliant light, and the private entrance where Diamond Dora had attacked Falcon like a tigress, was silent—almost ghostly—now.

Into a hallway of the frame house Jordan led the detective, and the two went up a flight of steps together.

"We needn't be cautious; the dead can't hear," laughed the young man, bursting in a door, and turning upon the little man-hunter in a room lit by a wall-lamp.

"Heavens!" cried Father Ferret, as he came to a sudden halt. "What kind of fate brought these people together?"

This was what he saw:

On the floor beside the bed lay the figure of a perfectly molded woman.

The face was shapely but unnaturally dark, and its true beauty was distorted as if by a terrible struggle with pain.

The hands were clinched and in one was a dagger, the point of which, broken off, glistened in the floor.

The woman was dead!

On the bed lay the body of the man who had done the work.

He, too, had passed to the beyond, but on his parchment-like face rested a grin of Satanic triumph.

It was Falcon, and the woman on the floor with the marks of fingers at her throat was the Queen of Bowie Notch!

Fate, and not Captain Bluff, had brought the two together.

Father Ferret and Jordan could only conjecture how the fatal meeting had taken place.

They did not know that Diamond Dora had avoided the keen eyes of her dark guard Dom Pablo at the Occidental, that she had wormed from Falcon's boy spy on duty there his whereabouts and condition, and that she had sought him with fire in her eyes.

They did not see her enter the dying man's room with the stealth of a slipped witch, nor did they see Falcon start when he found her bending over him when he thought her far away.

"You here?" cried Falcon. "You come like an imp fresh from Tartarus, but by heaven! there's nobody I'd sooner see than you!"

"Then came a sudden snake-like spring by the stilettoed man; all his strength was in the leap, and his hand was at Queen Dora's throat before she could withdraw.

The long fingers closing there seemed to unnerve her; they sunk deeper and deeper in her throat!

The demon of vengeance was in Falcon's glare; death in his terrible clutch!

There could be but one ending to a scene like this.

It came at last.

When Falcon opened his hand the witch of the gold-diggings dropped to the floor.

Falcon looked at her for a moment, laughed like a fiend and sunk back.

And the lamp threw its light upon two dead—Queen Dora on the floor, and Falcon, her victim, on his tumbled pillow!

Father Ferret and Jordan looked at the couple for a moment and went out.

"There will never be a settlement between the woman and her husband, Claude Stacey," said the detective. "I expect another tragedy is happening now at Number Ten Nevada street.

The young man looked at the speaker but did not speak.

"Jordan, if you will go with me to the Occidental I will introduce you to my daughter," the shadower continued.

"Your daughter?" exclaimed the youth.

"To Ninez."

"But there is no young lady there but Sybil."

"Sybil has disappeared and Ninez is in her place," smiled Father Ferret.

Jordan looked thunderstruck.

"Does she know all this?" he stammered.

"Not yet."

"But you will tell her soon?"

"To-night. The documents which my wife took from the house on Dupont street are, in part, the ones missing from Hidalgo Dick's treasury. She has added to them a confession which leaves no doubt that Sybil, or Ninez, is my child.

"Jordan, this is the trail whose secrets I would not confide even to you. Diamond Dora actually believed that the girl was her own daughter by Claude Stacey. The coiled serpent tattoo is not a strange one, but to mark her child the more surely, Faro Fan, my wife, added a triad above the serpent's head. The two children were of the same age, and, my wife says, strangely resembled each other. Diamond Dora's child is dead. There is no doubt of this, Jordan, my boy."

And Father Ferret's hand fell upon the youth's shoulder.

"When I have told her all this and clasped her to my heart, my big trail will come to an end. The diagram of Hidalgo Dick's bonanza is not insoluble. A head like yours, Jordan, will get the key and unlock the whole thing for Ninez."

"It will! Show me the paper, Father Ferret!"

"Not now, but we will get to work pretty soon," was the reply. "Whither shall we go first—to number ten, or to the Occidental?"

"To the hotel."

Ten minutes later the two men entered the hotel, and Father Ferret touched Jordan significantly as he whispered:

"Let me tell her first, my boy; then you can come up."

Jordan lit a cigar in the reception-room and waited.

Suddenly the splendid figure of a dark, Indian-like-looking individual crossed his line of vision.

"It is Dom Pablo!" ejaculated the youth. "He is going up-stairs after Father Ferret."

The movements of the half-blood were enough to take Jordan forward.

He knew what would happen if Dom Pablo found Sybil in the hands of the Frisco Shadow. There was not a moment to be lost.

The half-blood was on the steps when the agile young Californian began the pursuit.

Dom Pablo had seen and recognized the detective.

In an instant Jordan was on the stair, but Pablo the Dark had reached the top step.

All at once the young shadow's hand dropped upon the half-blood's shoulder.

"Santa Cristo! what kind of a snake are you?" cried Pablo, as he whirled.

"I am Jordan!" was the answer.

The three words seemed enough.

With a tigerish cry Pablo went straight at the old shadower's pupil, and the next moment the loungers in the reception-room saw two men, interlocked, roll down the steps.

A dozen men sprung forward, and somebody wrenched a knife from the clutch of a dark-skinned fellow, and the others tore the couple apart.

"Santa Cristo! the young man is like a cat!" ejaculated Dom Pablo. "I will have his blood for it yet!"

"This is the fellow who gave me the slip when I arrested him for the stabbing at Harkaway's,"

exclaimed a stalwart policeman at that moment, and although the half-blood drew back, he was collared and held.

The following moment he was in handcuffs!

It was still the same eventful night when a little band of men led by Father Ferret entered the house on Nevada street.

What they found there is briefly told.

It recalled to the little detective's mind the scene to which Jordan had led him a short time before.

This time two men lay dead near together in a room, whose appearance told that a terrible encounter had taken place.

"Hello! these men were brothers," cried one of the men who looked at the sight.

"Two Dromios, by Jupiter!" cried another.

Father Ferret smiled.

"They were no kin," he said to the crowd.

"Nature made them strangely alike to play one of the biggest games I have ever dealt with. They are the two Claude Staceys of California, one an impostor, the other the true Claude. The game has been played out. Gentlemen, you will let me say that Father Ferret is a shadower no longer."

It is not for us to say how the true story of her birth affected Sybil, as we may still call her.

When he had told her all even to his unhappy married life with her mother, the Faro Fan of our romance, Father Ferret sought out Jordan and unfolded to him a little mystery connected with his own life.

The young shadow had never known anything concerning his parentage, and he was proud to learn by the detective's narrative that the best blood of the golden State ran through his veins.

The fortune which Claude Stacey's father had left him went to the State after a lapse of years, for the heir left no child to whom it could descend.

Dom Pablo the Dark did not tarry long in the hands of the police.

When he got out and found the game up, he turned back upon Bull's Eye when he was once stripped of his wealth, and Indian-like, gave it the most memorable night in its history!

We are too near the end of our story to describe the scene, but let us say in a single sentence that among the dead planted afterward by Bull's Eye on the mountain, was a handsome fellow with a dark skin and sloe-black eyes.

Flash Frank, the tall alcalde, lost his mountain queen by the death of Diamond Dora, but clung and still clings to Bowie Notch.

The diagram which fell into Father Ferret's possession yielded to Jordan's talents, and proved to be the key to a bonanza whose wealth has ever since been falling at Sybil's feet.

Father Ferret has kept his resolve never to take another trail again, although he has received the most flattering offers to do so.

Need we say that Sybil, or Ninez, as you please, gentle reader, is now a married lady, and that the handsome man who calls her his wife is Jordan, the Frisco Shadow's pupil?

And thus having followed our drama of city and mountain to an appropriate conclusion, we pen the most suitable words of all—

THE END.

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